LEST WE FORGET

JOSEPH HOCKING

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To Uncle Bob
with best wishes for Xmas 1929
From
Cecil Watson

"LEST WE FORGET"

By

JOSEPH HOCKING

Author of "All Men are Liars," "The Story of Andrew Fairfax," "The Scarlet Woman," etc.

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LONDON, AND MELBOURNE

POPULAR NOVELS

BY

JOSEPH HOCKING

THE STORY OF ANDREW FAIRFAX
ISHMAEL PENGELLY: AN OUTCAST
THE MONK OF MAR SABA
ZILLAH
JABEZ EASTERBROOK
ALL MEN ARE LIARS
FIELDS OF FAIR RENOWN
WEAPONS OF MYSTERY
THE PURPLE ROBE
THE SCARLET WOMAN
THE BIRTHRIGHT
MISTRESS NANCY MOLESWORTH
AND SHALL TRELAWNEY DIE?
LEST WE FORGET
GREATER LOVE
ESAU
THE COMING OF THE KING
ROGER TREWINION
THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD
GOD AND MAMMON
AN ENEMY HATH DONE THIS
THE RING OF DESTINY
HEARTSEASE
THE TENANT OF CROMLECH COTTAGE
NANCY TREVANION'S LEGACY

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To My Son

CUTHBERT,

IN THE HOPE THAT

HE MAY ONE DAY READ

AND UNDERSTAND

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"LEST WE FORGET"

CHAPTER I

HOW THIS HISTORY CAME TO BE WRITTEN

MY story rightly begins, I take it, when my father was summoned to London to witness the Coronation of Queen Mary. He went right joyously, for, as he often said to me, he was somewhat tired of the reign of a forward boy, who was the tool of a schemer like Northumberland. Indeed, he declared that England did not know by whom it was governed, and when the work of the Reformed religion went forward, and my father heard of parish priests taking unto themselves wives, he grew very hot about the matter, and uttered words which, if reported in certain quarters, would have given him considerable trouble.

"What are we? Where are we?" he would exclaim. "During Henry's time the nation was playing at see-saw with religion. First we were under Rome, and then we wer'n't under Rome; and now, with a forward boy on the throne, who can be led astray by those who have charge of him, what are we coming to?"

For my father, Richard Hamstead, was a man who knew his mind, and spoke plainly. The Hamsteads for many generations had been true to the old faith, and would have naught to do with the changes which some people believed nccessary.

Even during Henry's reign he spoke so boldly that he was in danger of being arrested for treason, but being only

a country squire, and much beloved by the neighbours, no action was taken against him. As I have just said, he fretted and fumed a great deal during young Edward's time, and thus, when those foolish people had been routed, who struggled to make Lady Jane Grey queen, and things had settled into place again at the proclamation of Queen Mary, he laughed mightily like a man greatly rejoiced, as indeed he was.

"This is good news, Dick," he said heartily. "We shall have better times now. The old religion will be established once more, and the heretics will be put down firmly, but I believe kindly."

And so he went away to London from our old home, Hamstead Manor, which is situate not far from the town of Barnet, some fourteen miles from London town.

This took place on the thirtieth of September, in the year 1553, the day before Queen Mary was crowned at Westminster by Stephen Gardiner, the cleverest man in England.

I well remember the first day of October. Indeed, I was much minded to go to London myself and see the sights, for I had a good horse who would have taken me there in a little more than an hour, but I reflected that I should ill-please my father by so doing, and that, after all, I should see but a poor show, for it was given out that the new queen cared not for processions, nor for gew-gaws generally. The morning opened right royally. The sky was cloudless, and I have never seen Hamstead woods look more lovely than then. Master Price says that autumn is sad; that may be, and yet there is a glory of colour in October that can scarcely be matched in any other month of the year. Anyhow, I revelled in that bright morning, and so warm and soft was the air that I took my only sister Celia out for a walk in the sun, in order that a little colour might be tempted into her cheeks, for Celia was far from strong, and I liked to give her all the pleasure I was able. Indeed, if the truth must be told, the fact that I wanted to stay with her, while my father had gone to London, was, perhaps the strongest reason why I did not go to see the queen on her way to be crowned.

Nothing happened for many days. My father did not return from London, and we were beginning to grow anxious, when he rode up to the door in finer apparel than we had ever seen him before.

"Dick," he said, "come with me. I have important things to say to you."

"Is there news?" I asked.

"News," he cried, "aye, news, and good fortune too, if I am not mistaken."

"For whom?"

"For you, Dick. Come with me, I have much to say."

In spite of my father's brave words and cheery tones, I thought I saw a look of anxiety in his eyes, as though he somewhat dreaded the news he had to tell me. This, if possible, made me more desirous of knowing what was in his mind; for young life, I suppose, is ever curious, and I longed for adventure more than words can say. The time was evening, and the air was frosty, and my father walked to the open chimney and spread his hands before the logs of burning wood as though he were cold. Some servants were hovering around the room; some had brought one thing and some another, while all waited for a kindly greeting from my father, which he never failed to give them after an absence from home.

To-night, however, he took no notice of them, much to their evident surprise and disappointment; for he was a kind master, and while he always kept a servant in his place, he bestowed more attention on those who served him than was usual among men in his position. He did not speak for some time, but looked impatiently around, as though he wondered at their seeming slothfulness, then suddenly remembering himself, he said—

"That is all, I think, and now leave us, I wish to be alone with Master Richard."

The servants walked down the room quickly, and looked not unlike spectres in the dim candlelight, but before they reached the door my father rushed forward and gave them a few words of kindly greeting as his custom was. Whereupon, all of them, and especially the waiting-maids, smiled with much satisfaction.

"Now, Dick, we can talk," he said, when they had gone.

"Yes, father," I said, and waited for him to proceed; but he spoke no word. Instead of speaking he walked around the room, now quickly, and again with much deliberation. Presently he stopped, and gazed at me long and steadily. I was standing by the fireplace, leaning against the mantelshelf. As chance would have it, too, I was clothed in my greatest finery, and had that night put on a new pair of breeches, with silk hose, and appropriate garters, as well as some new shoes, which were smarter than was ordinary. My father looked at me, as I said, long and steadily, then he continued his walk.

"You are a fine-grown lad," he said, when he stopped before me a second time.

"Yes, father," I said, well-pleased at the compliment.

"How old are you, Dick?"

"Twenty-one next June."

"Oh yes, how stupid of me to forget. You are a good swordsman, too, for I taught you myself."

"I hope so," I replied.

"I know you are," was his answer. "I myself was regarded twenty years ago as more than ordinarily good, and yet when we played with foils the other day, you sent mine across the room by a trick of which I knew nothing."

"That was a year ago," I answered.

"Was it? Ah yes, perhaps it was; but you are a good swordsman. Strong, too. What legs you have, to be sure!" and he squeezed the calf of my leg as a butcher might squeeze the flesh of a steer that he meant to kill

"What weight are you, Dick?"

"More than nine score pounds, father."

"Ah, that is good for a lad of twenty, very good. And you ride well, too. I remember now; as for your mare, she is a beauty. She will run until she drops."

"Yes, the mare is well enough," I answered, "but what has this to do with your great news?"

He took no notice of my words, but continued looking at me steadily.

"Neither are you a fool," he went on. "Master Price hath taught you well. I will say that for him, although he

doth not hate these heretics and hot-gospellers as much as a priest of the Church ought. But you are very young; you have had no experience."

"I cannot help that, can I?" I said a little testily.

"No, no, no. Naturally." And then he went on with his walk.

"You saw the queen crowned?" I said presently, for I wanted to know what his strange behaviour portended, and I thought this question might lead him to tell me what he had in his mind.

"Oh, yes. God bless the queen," he said fervently. "A good woman, Dick. A holy woman, and a most gracious lady."

"I am right glad," I said heartily.

My father looked pleased.

"And you saw the great Bishops?"

"What Bishops?"

"Why, the Bishop of Winchester, and the Bishop of London."

"Oh yes, I saw them. Ah, Dick, you are very young!"

"What makes you say that again?" I asked. "I know I am young; but what hath that to do with the great Bishops?"

"This, Dick, this. These men will rule England, that is, they will be the queen's chief advisers; at any rate, until she marries."

"Will the queen marry?"

"I predict she will marry Philip of Spain, son to the man to whom she was betrothed years ago; well, even if she doth, Gardiner and Bonner will rule England."

"Why?"

"Well, they will still be her advisers, and as both of them share the hopes of the queen, well, their power will be almost unlimited."

"Churchmen have rarely done much good when they have been rulers," I said precociously; "but what have these Bishops to do with my youth?"

"They have your future in their hands."

"How?" I asked.

"Dick, would you like to be great? Would you like to

be something more than an unknown country squire? Would you like to become one of the rulers of England?"

My heart gave a great leap, for such had been my desire for many months. There are but few men less to be envied than the man who lives in a country house with no greater interests than those of his lands, his horses, and his tenants. At least, so I thought in those days, and so I leapt at my father's words as a foolish trout leaps at a bait.

"Yes, I would," I cried. "I want to do something, to be something."

"Ah, that is well, that is well," cried my father eagerly, and then more slowly, "Ah, but the boy is very young!"

I did not answer to this, for the constant mention of my age vexed me.

"You are a good Catholic," said my father presently. "That I know, for you never neglect mass, and Father Bennet hath a high opinion of you."

"Yes," I replied, "I am a good Catholic."

"You have no leaning towards heresy?"

"No," I answered, and I spoke the truth; for although I was much interested in young King Edward, I had no sympathy with such of the hot-gospellers as I had heard. My father had trained me to hate heresy, and while Master Price's silence on this question had often set me wondering, I remained loyal to the ancient Church.

"It is well. It is well. Bonner will question you closely on that matter."

"Bonner! You mean the Bishop of London?"

"Yes."

"And he will question me?"

"Oh, assuredly, he is very careful, very careful on matters of faith. It is true he went far astray during Henry's time; but he seeks to atone now."

"But how will he question me? Is he coming here?"

"Coming here? No. But you will go to him."

"I go to Bishop Bonner?"

"Yes; and that quickly."

"But why?" I asked, much taken aback for the moment.

"He hath important work that he wishes to be done, and

he hath decided to employ you, if you prove satisfactory."

"He told you this?"

"Yes, he told me so much."

"What is the work?"

"That he desires to explain himself after he hath catechized you. This I know, it is a work of importance."

"Is it to be done in England?"

"Oh yes!"

"Is it attended with danger?"

"Possibly, I do not know. But what of that? You are young, you are strong; a good swordsman, a good horseman, and you will have powerful friends."

"Father," I said presently, "it may be all plain to you, but I understand nothing."

"No, no, lad," replied my father hurriedly though kindly; "I am afraid I have but poorly told you what is expected of you, but have no fear, have no fear. You will have a great opportunity, and if you are as keen-witted and as faithful as I believe, your future is assured."

"But will you not give me particulars of what is expected of me, sir?" I asked, "may I not know what is on foot? For surely it is not wise to act blindly."

I dare say my self-esteem had great part in this speech, for, as a rule, lads of twenty are inclined to think much of their own importance, and to resent any want of attention which they may think due to themselves.

My father hesitated a moment; and I saw by the look in his eyes that a struggle was going on in his mind.

"The queen is inclined to be very merciful while being very just," he said presently. "She hath decided that her reign shall be one of clemency and mercy. It is true that she is determined to establish the true faith in the land again, and to undo the evil which hath befallen the land through the late king and his counsellors."

He hesitated, and I waited for him to proceed.

"But while that is true," he continued, "her most faithful advisers tell her that she must put down treason and heresy with a firm hand. Her Majesty is prepared to grant liberty of conscience in so far as it is compatible with the safety and welfare of the land, but she will be severe on

those who seek to take away her crown, and to undermine the faith of the Church."

"That I can see plainly," I replied.

"Lady Jane Grey is still a menace to Her Majesty," went on my father, "while those who uphold her claims are, as you can see, guilty of high treason."

"But Northumberland and the rest of them have been beheaded," I urged.

"It is also true that nearly all who believe in Protestant doctrines are enemies to the throne," went on my father, "while it is believed that there are many who at this very moment are plotting against the queen and her government."

"This may be all true," I answered, "and yet I cannot see what all this hath to do with me, neither can I understand why the Bishop of London, who hath all the land at his command, should settle upon me to execute his mission."

"What you have to do, and the reason he hath for selecting you to do it, will be revealed in good time," said my father. "I have told you all that falls within my province to tell, and to-morrow, when you appear before the Bishop, and perhaps those even greater than he, you will have all necessary instructions given."

"To-morrow?"

"Aye, to-morrow," replied my father. "You will start early in the morning, right early."

"Alone?"

"Alone, Dick, alone. Your work is important, so important that not even a serving-man must accompany you."

I was silent, for the truth was, I was but ill-pleased at such scant information.

"You have no objections to raise, have you, Dick?" said my father, a little anxiously, I thought.

"Not if you wish me to go, father," I replied, "and you do wish me to go, do you not?"

"I do," replied he slowly. "I do. It will mean your welfare, your great promotion. It will mean, if I am not mistaken in you, the first step towards making the name of Hamstead great and honoured."

"Where do I go?" I asked presently.

"You will go first of all to Lambeth," he replied, "to the address which I will give you. Do you understand?"

"Yes," I replied rather gloomily, for somehow I was far from being pleased.

"And you will be faithful, Dick?"

"To what, to whom?" I asked.

"To the queen, and to our faith."

"I will act as becomes a man of honour," I answered, whereupon my father smiled, and looked at me affectionately. For though a stern man in many things, he loved me fondly, and showed much forbearance with my boyish conceits.

"And now," he said, like one much relieved, "we will go to Celia and spend a right pleasant evening, for this will be your last night at home for many a long week."

When I got to bed that night I tossed sleeplessly for hours. For many things, I was much pleased because of my new prospects, but on other accounts my heart was heavy. I did not like leaving Celia, and I was not at all pleased at my father's reserve. But I knew him to be a man of honour, and that he would never consent to my undertaking any work unbefitting a gentleman.

Both father and Celia were up betimes to bid me good-bye in the morning, and both laughed pleasantly as I mounted my mare; all the same I could not help seeing the tears in my sister's eyes, as well as the tremor on her lips, while the sight of my father's face haunted me for many a day.

"Be faithful, my lad," said my father, as I bade him good-bye, "faithful to your Church and to your queen, and may God be with you."

"And see that you do not come back plain Dick Hamstead," said Celia, laughing through her tears. "When next we meet I shall expect to see Sir Richard Hamstead, courtier and statesman."

I laughed at her simplicity of speech and then trotted towards Barnet in high good-humour with myself, and with the world generally. For now that I was on horseback, and having said my adieus, I had no fear and no troubled

thoughts about the future. As a rule, a youth of twenty does not suffer from forebodings, rather he lives in the blissful present, and if the future occupies his mind at all, it tells only of gay doings, great fights, and greater victories.

And so I had not one troubled thought. My mare carried me as though I were a feather, and though the leaves had begun to fade, and the air blew keenly, the sun shone bright, and the sky was almost cloudless. The road, too, was in excellent condition. It is true that for the first mile or two after leaving my father's house the way was not all that could be desired, but once in the Great North Road nothing impeded my progress. Indeed, Phœbe, my mare, struck into a gallop the moment her hoofs rung upon the hard, well-made thoroughfare, as though for the very joy of the life that was in her, and I, nothing loath, gave her a loose rein, so that we reached Barnet before I was well aware.

Nothing happened during my ride to London. Once having passed through Barnet town a fair country-side spread itself before me, and beyond a house or two at Totteridge, scarcely a human dwelling could be seen. Indeed, I had well reached Highgate before I was warned that London lay in the near distance. When once I got into London, however my speed was much checked; all the same, it was still early in the forenoon when I reached Lambeth, and asked for information concerning the place at which I was commanded to meet the great men, who, my father told me, held my future in their hands, and who were to send me on the first important mission of my life.

CHAPTER II

TWO OF THE GREATEST MEN IN ENGLAND

I WAS not long in finding the place at which I had to stay at Lambeth; indeed, I have a shrewd suspicion that the room into which I was led was in some way associated with Lambeth Palace, but of this I am not sure. The

apartment was not large, neither did it seem of great importance, for the furniture was, I thought, somewhat poor and meagre, but I did not pay great attention to these things. I was far too eager to know whom I was to see, and what was the work I had to do.

I waited in the room it may be an hour or more, no one speaking to me the whole of that time. It is true that some men in attendance occasionally came into the room, but beyond a passing glance they took no notice of me, and after attending to the fire, or taking a book from a table, they left me again without speaking a word.

Presently, however, two men entered at the opposite end from which I sat, by means of a way which I had not noticed. I saw afterwards that a curtain covered the door, so that had any one been suspicious of my behaviour I could have been watched without myself being aware of the fact. But I did not think of this at the time, I was too much interested in the two men who had entered, and who took their seats at a table that had been placed close to the fire. Both of them looked keenly at me, but for a little time neither of them gave me a word.

Both of them were men who, when once seen, were not easily forgotten, and for the life of me I could not look straight at them when either of them turned his attention to me. Both of them were well advanced in life, and both had a haggard, worn look, as though they had seen much trouble. I remembered afterwards, however, that both of them had but lately come from prison, whither they had been sent during the late king's time, because they were regarded as dangerous to Edward's government. For these men bore names which resounded throughout the whole of England during the next few years, names by which children were frightened, names which made the flesh of strong men creep. One was Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, and Chancellor of England, and the other was Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London.

The one who impressed me most was Gardiner. So tall was he that I, who prided myself on my stalwart appearance, looked almost small beside him. In addition to his

height and mighty proportions, moreover, he carried with him an air of authority. One could see at a glance that he had been associated with great men and far-reaching movements. He had come face to face with those before whom the world trembled. I remembered that he had been a friend of Wolsey, a favourite with Henry VIII., and that he had been sent on important missions, even to the Pope himself. I remember wondering why such as he should deign to notice such as I ; but my father had been his friend in bygone days, and I was told that because of this he was kind to me. Even before he spoke, the man fascinated me. His large features, his great square jaws, his deep-set piercing eyes, all made me feel my littleness, and made me realize that he could play with me, even as a spider plays with a fly.

Edmund Bonner, although not so imposing as Gardiner, was still a striking-looking man. But I did not like him. I thought his eyes looked shifty and cruel, while the lips which covered his large yellow teeth betrayed, I thought, utter mercilessness. Moreover, he impressed me as a man of grim determination who would stand at nothing, and who, by the impetuosity of his own will, would carry out the projects he had in his mind. I said that Bonner's eyes looked cruel, and it is true ; nevertheless, at times they had a gleam of humour as though he loved a joke, while the mouth, though nearly covered by the large beard he wore (which was a fashion of the times), betrayed, at times, the fact that he could on occasions be humane and forgiving. He was neither so tall nor so striking as Gardiner, however, nor did his words carry such weight.

I must confess that my heart beat fast as they watched me ; indeed, I felt as though Stephen Gardiner's eyes pierced my mind, and penetrated my very soul. After our interview was over, too, I called to my mind that it was Gardiner who spoke most.

"Richard Hamstead!" he said abruptly, after opening some books and closing them again.

"That is my name, my lord Bishop," I replied.

"Son of Richard Hamstead, good Catholic and honest man."

"The same, my lord."

"It is well. Honest father generally means honest son; but not always. Look you, lad, are you honest, faithful?"

I did not answer, for I felt that words would be wasted, whereupon he smiled grimly, and said, "But you look dull and thick-headed."

At this the blood rushed to my cheeks, for no youth of twenty loves such epithets applied to himself. Moreover, my anger made me less afraid of this man, so I answered him tartly.

"You are a privileged person or you would not say it," I said.

"I say what I please, and what I think," was his reply.

"Were you a layman you would not say it twice," I answered loftily, "but as you are not, I bid you good-day,' and I turned to go.

"Hoity-toity, Richard Hamstead," he said, grimly protruding his lower jaw as his custom was, "stand still, my lad, and prove that my words be not true."

"Rumour hath it that when your lordship's mind is made up you do not change it," I answered. "A dull, thick-headed man is of no use to you, therefore it will be better for you if you select one whose appearance is more suggestive of your own."

Had I not been angry I should not have dared to say this, for although Mary had been but a short time queen, he was master of England, and held my life in the hollow of his hand. But an angry youth of twenty knows not how to hold his tongue. At the same time I expected him to punish me right heartily for my sauciness, and I wondered what my father would say.

To my surprise he laughed in a grim sort of way as though he enjoyed my petulance.

"No, a dull, thick-headed man is of no use to me," he replied presently, "and mayhap you are no fool after all. What think you, Master Bonner?"

"I think the lad a worthy son of a worthy sire," replied the Bishop of London, in soothing tones.

"It may be so, it may be so," he answered; then turning to me, he said sharply, "Well, I am always willing to

own a mistake if I make one. And I will say this, thy looks have improved since ten minutes ago. But look you here, are you quick to think, quick to act, quick to strike?"

"It is not for me to say, my lord. Besides, a man's words count for nothing in answer to such a question."

"That may be," he replied. "That you cannot be slow to speak, I have proved. You say the first thing that comes to your mind, and choose not your words."

I could not help smiling at his mistake, for had I said all that was in my mind when he said I was stupid of look, I should probably have been sent to Marshalsea prison.

The man caught the purport of my mind in a moment, for his deep-set eyes twinkled, and he laughed grimly; but, all he said was—

"A good swordsman?"

"I hope passable, my lord."

"Ah well, it doth not matter," he said slowly, "a keen wit I need. A faithful soul I need; but let swords lie rusty, our gracious queen's reign must be one of peace and progress to our holy religion. You are a sound Catholic?"

"Yes," I replied.

"You hate heresy?"

"Right heartily."

"You long for the country to be again embraced in the fold of Mother Church?"

"Yes, my lord."

"That is well, right well. Mayhap, you are neither a knave nor a fool. But we shall see, we shall see. You love our gracious queen?"

"As a loyal subject should, my lord."

His keen eyes rested on me for a moment, then he started up and began to pace the room. As he did so his great stature impressed me more and more, while that mysterious strength which his every movement suggested, almost made me shudder.

"To a faithful servant I can be a kind master," he said, "but to varlets, to knaves, to fools, I show no mercy, mind that, mind that!" Then he went on talking as if to himself; but I suspect he had a reason for all he did.

"The country hath been ill-ruled, ill-ruled. Money hath been wasted like water, and that precocious boy hath been the tool of those who used him as a means to enrich themselves. Those who, like myself, would save England from ruin, they cast into prison—but, well, God has left them in my hands. I must sift, I must sift. I will reward the faithful, but I will trample the wicked in the dust. Is not that right?"

"It is what God doth," I answered.

"And I am God's instrument," he said.

For a few seconds there was silence, except for the footsteps of Stephen Gardiner as he paced the room.

"Can a woman twist thee around her fingers?" he cried presently.

"No woman ever has," I replied.

"You have never been in love?"

"I know no woman well save my sister, and she is but young."

"Ah well, but look here, boy. Women are tricky creatures if they be not kept in their place, always excepting Her Gracious Majesty. Marriage is well when rightly considered, but mark, the man who can be twisted by the soft speeches of a woman, or the lowering of her eyelids, or the dropping of her tears, is an arrant fool. Mind that. I tell you this, because perchance you have the makings of a man in you, perchance you can rise high in this realm. But we shall see, we shall see."

I stood still and waited for him to continue.

"The queen hath enemies, naturally. The hot-gospellers who have defamed our images, burnt our relics, blasphemed the sacraments, and howled at the very priests of God, have desired, and still desire, that their blasphemies shall continue. The fools who used Lady Jane Grey to wit. There be men all around who echo the words of such as Wyatt and Northumberland. They think I do not know; but I do. I know everything. You guess this?"

"It is easy to guess," I answered.

"You are right, it is easy to guess. Well, England must be saved. A nation outside the Church is against God,

and a nation against God must perish. You see this?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Even Northumberland, when standing by the block, said that all England's woes were because of her apostasy."

I said nothing, for I felt the late Duke's confession to be the words of a coward.

"And so I must watch everywhere, everywhere."

Again I wondered why this man should utter his thoughts so plainly to a youth like myself. For boy as I was, impulsive as I was, I knew that it was not customary for such as Stephen Gardiner to unburden his mind to untried lads.

At this moment Bishop Bonner, who had been writing on a piece of paper, kicked the table. It seemed to me at the time that this was intentional, for it drew Gardiner's attention to him, and I saw his eyes rest on the paper on which the other had been writing. I noticed, too, that a look of intelligence passed between them, as though Bonner's action purported something.

"Yes, yes, Master Bonner," said Gardiner, "I know that other affair is waiting, but I have not finished with Master Richard Hampstead yet," whereupon Bishop Bonner smiled.

"The truth is," Stephen Gardiner continued, looking towards me, "there be those in our midst who are suspected of treason, base treason. I have received reports of such. In truth, I have received information of plots now afoot against both religion and country which must be put down. You understand, Richard Hamstead?"

"Plainly, my lord Bishop;" but I could not see why he should tell me this.

"On the other hand," he went on, "there be those who are doubtless wrongly suspected, and while I punish the guilty, I must protect the innocent. Now there is a man whom I believe to be right faithful, who never plotted aught against queen or religion, and yet I have reports concerning him from those who are doubtless his enemies. What think you of such a case?"

"I think the truth should be found out, and if he is innocent his enemies should be punished."

"That is well spoken," said Stephen Gardiner, "well

spoken. Methinks, Richard Hamstead, I may as well recall those words I spoke of you. All the same, it is delicate work, this finding out. For his innocence must be proved beyond doubt. The innocence also of those who dwell beneath his roof must be demonstrated. This, moreover, must be done without allowing him to suspect that we have heard aught against him."

"If he is loyal and faithful, I think I can see reason for this," was my answer. "It would hurt an honourable man much to have treason or heresy objected against him.'

"Hence the necessity of a man with a quick brain, a still tongue, and a loyal heart," he answered.

I was silent.

"This is not the work of a spy," he went on, "for a spy seeketh out evil things. It is the work of a loyal gentleman, and a man of honour, who determines that justice shall be done to an innocent man."

"I see that," I replied.

"That is why I have selected you for this work."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. The Hamsteads are known to be faithful to both Church and crown. Your father rejoiced to see our gracious queen crowned. As for you—well, you are young, and—and, well, a right passable youth, Richard Hamstead."

Again his piercing eyes rested on me, and while in my heart of hearts I did not like his proposal, the man, not by his words so much as by his presence and his changed manner of speech, made me pleased with myself that I had gained his confidence.

"What say you to it?" he asked presently.

"I say naught against it," I replied, feeling myself unable to oppose his will; "but I see difficulties."

"Any fool can see difficulties," he answered gruffly, "wise men overcome them—but what are they?"

"I must have some reason for entering the man's house," I answered, "for if I am able to prove his innocence to the satisfaction of those who suspect him, I must needs be in his presence a good while, and I must come into contact with his friends."

"That is true—right true. But that can be arranged."

I stood hesitating, for I did not see the thing plainly.

"I will give you a letter which will carry its welcome with it," he said.

I ought to have seen what this purported, but I did not. Since then I have called myself a fool for my blindness.

"Then the difficulty will be overcome," I said. "May I see the letter?"

"It will be forthcoming at the right time."

Again I ought to have looked beyond the mere present; but I was young, I was unused to the ways of the world, the man's power enveloped me like a shadow, and, beside all this, I looked upon him not only as the Chancellor of England, but as a holy Bishop of the true Church, almost as the mouthpiece of God.

"That should be sufficient," I said.

"Very well then, it is settled?"

"Yes, my lord, I will do my best. It will be a pleasure to vindicate an honest man."

"Good, Richard Hamstead; and now before you start, listen carefully to my instructions."

CHAPTER III

MY MISSION TO BARCROFT HALL

AS may be imagined, I was much interested in the instructions which Stephen Gardiner might give me, because as yet I felt myself almost wholly in the dark concerning the work I was expected to do. Moreover, I felt myself unable to understand these men. I felt as though a veil hung before them, which, while it did not hinder them from looking into my very soul, prevented me from catching even a glimpse of their purposes.

"There are several things you doubtless wish to know," said Stephen Gardiner presently, and then he waited as though he expected me to speak again. I tried to be silent, tried to believe that he was formulating his plans, and thus expected no response from me, but in this I was unsuccess-

ful. Indeed, I afterwards discovered that one of the secrets of his power was that he could make men speak without asking them questions. Thus it was that I, a raw youth, with but little experience of men and movements, was but a child in his hands, and could no more help obeying his will than a new-fledged chick can help trembling when you hold it in your hands.

"There are indeed," I said, and then waited for him to proceed. He continued silent, however, whereupon I went on stammeringly—

"I should like to know where I am to go, and who the man is, against whom false reports have been given. I would also know my course of action when I reach his house. And then there is another thing."

Again I stopped, and still he continued watching me, but speaking no word.

"The man to whom you send me, and whom you believe loyal to Church and queen, may have enemies unknown to himself," I went on, "therefore if it be known that I come at your behest, I shall but place them on their guard, and give them opportunity to make innocence appear as guilt."

Stephen Gardiner's eyes twinkled, and I could not help believing that a sign passed between the two great Bishops.

"You are a lad of some penetration, Richard Hamstead," remarked Gardiner. "I withdraw those words I spoke of you a little while ago. And let this be an example to you. Never be afraid to confess a mistake. It is sometimes hard to do, but it pays in the long run."

I could not help feeling flattered at the great man's approbation, and at that moment I was in high good-humour with myself, besides being determined to prove to his satisfaction that he did not over-estimate my abilities.

"The man to whose house I wish you to go," he went on, "is one Godfrey Bedford, who lives some distance from the town of Brentwood."

"Brentwood is not far from here," I said.

"Not more than thirty miles at most, as the crow flies," was his reply, "but owing to the crookedness of the road, a long distance hath to be traversed. Still, it is but an easy day's journey for a man who rides a good horse, even

although Barcroft Hall, where Godfrey Bedford lives, is a dozen miles or so beyond that town."

"The road hath a bad name, my lord Bishop," I said.

"It hath a bad name, and, perhaps, not without reason," he replied; "but I hope soon to remedy the bad state of things. During the reign of the late king, or rather, during the reign of those who drained the nation of its wealth, the whole country hath become infested with robbers and cut-throats. Money which ought to have been spent in good government hath been wasted in —— But enough of that. You ride a good horse, you carry a good sword, and know how to defend yourself," and the great man smiled upon me in a way which made me careless of the dangers I might have to encounter.

"How long expect you that I should stay there?" I asked.

"Until you are perfectly assured of his loyalty both to Church and to queen, by infallible proofs," was his reply.

"In that case I should have good excuse to give to Master Bedford for what may be a long sojourn in the district," I answered.

"True again, Master Hamstead, and I have fully prepared for this. The letter which I will give you will fully explain to Master Godfrey Bedford all that may be necessary. You will be received as a welcome guest, and will be admitted freely into all friendly councils."

"That is well," I replied, and my heart glowed with pleasure at the thought of new and pleasant associations, as well as being able to give proof of the loyalty of a man against whom unjust suggestions had been made.

"There is a matter, however, to which I wish you to pay great heed," went on Stephen Gardiner. "The work upon which you are engaged is one that needs to be touched lightly. Your father spoke of you as trustworthy and discreet. I myself doubted this until I saw you and spoke to you. I now believe you to be one who can hold his tongue at the right moment. A great deal of the success of your mission depends on that. It is possible, nay, almost certain, that you will hear and see things that will astonish you. In such a case it will be for you to hold your tongue

and show no astonishment. Nay, rather you must act as though strange words and actions were expected by you. Still, in such case, I wish you to acquaint me without delay."

I opened my eyes wide at this, for I wot not what it meant.

"Then there is another matter," went on Stephen Gardiner, who at that moment strode up and down the room, "our meeting to-day must not be mentioned. Nay, more, you must in no circumstances confess a knowledge of my lord the Bishop of London nor of myself. I have grave reasons for this."

At this I was more puzzled than ever, and my mission grew less pleasant to me. I remembered my father's words, however. "The Bishop of Winchester is the greatest man in England," he said, "and you must trust him wholly. He hath weighty reasons for all that he doth, and seldom makes a mistake." Bearing these words in mind, therefore, I held my peace, and waited for him to proceed.

"This is a great day for you," continued Stephen Gardiner, "or it may be a great day. Her Majesty knows how to reward faithful service, and she much admires a man quick to think and quick to act. But mark you, Richard Hamstead, she lacketh patience with a bungler."

I was silent, for truly the man's eyes made me afraid.

"And more," this time it was Bishop Bonner who spoke, "both queen and Mother Church need strong men and true. Are you much attached to your old home, young man?"

"Yes," I replied quickly, for I called to mind my father, and the fair, sweet face of my sister Celia.

"But your father is still young," said the Bishop. "He will live thirty years yet, and the estate is not large enough to divide with a son. Some day you will marry."

"I have not thought of it," I answered.

"Not yet, but you will, you will. And mark you, there be many fair maids, aye, and many fair demesnes in England. For a true, loyal servant, and one who shall gain favour with Her Majesty, there is a great future, a

great future. There will be maids at Court who will smile on such. There is no reason why Richard Hamstead should not be lord over the finest place in the land, aye, and be something in the State, too."

My heart beat high with hope at this, for the Bishop's words inspired my imagination, and set my blood tingling.

"But, mind you," he continued, "we have no mercy on traitors nor heretics. You note this, Richard Hamstead, you note this. Lofty heads have fallen in the past, and they will again. God hath given England back to the Church, and the evil which hath been done must be undone. And now you may go."

"There is the letter to Master Godfrey Bedford," I said stammeringly, for the look in the man's face caused me to be down-hearted again.

"Yes, there is the letter," said Stephen Gardiner, "there is the letter. That shall be ready in a few hours, Richard Hamstead. Now I think you know all that is necessary."

I nodded my head, all the same I felt that I knew nothing at all, and when I came to consider the interview afterwards, I was at a loss to know what all the talk portended.

"You will now go to a place of lodging which you will find written on this paper," he continued. "It is a comfortable inn, where you will find all that is necessary for man and horse. To-night at seven o'clock a messenger will bring you the letter, which you must guard carefully, and present to no one but Godfrey Bedford."

He handed me a piece of paper as he spoke, and then let his deep-set, piercing eyes rest upon me again.

"Yours is a great trust, lad," he said, "a great trust, greater, perhaps, than you think. Be faithful, and your future is assured, but if not—then may God have mercy on you, for I will not."

"I will be faithful," I said stoutly.

"That is well, that is well. And mind, lad, mind. Keep your eyes open, keep your mind open, be ready for anything, everything. Be surprised at nothing. Be slow to

speak, quick to think, and be ready to face the very devil himself in order to do the queen's bidding."

"The queen's bidding?" I queried.

"Yes, the queen's bidding, for it is at Her Majesty's bidding that you do the work I have marked out for you."

"Then the queen knoweth of me?" I said.

"Aye, and expects great things of you, too," was the answer, and again Stephen Gardiner let his piercing eyes rest upon me, making my heart throb, half with fear and half with great anticipation.

"She shall not be disappointed," I cried, whereupon I found my way into the open air, and strode along the street like a conqueror. Perhaps it was half-an-hour later that I found myself in a comfortable hostel situate not far from the palace of Henry VIII., half-way between Fleet Street and the river. When I had partaken of food, and seen to it that my horse was well-foddered, I sat for a time alone thinking of my experience, and of the mission upon which I was to go. I had expected when I set out from my father's house that morning that all things would be made plain, whereas I was, as one may say, still befogged.

Just after seven o'clock a servant at the inn came to me, and said that a man waited below to see Master Richard Hamstead, whereupon I gave orders that he was to come where I was without delay; then I waited with some eagerness, for although I expected only an ordinary serving-man, I was naturally much interested in the bearer of the letter which Stephen Gardiner had promised to send.

My surprise was great, therefore, when a person dressed as a man of station entered the room. And this not because he was so attired, but because he was perhaps the most extraordinary individual I had ever set eyes on. He was far from old, being barely forty years of age, nevertheless he looked a man of wide experience. The word by which I can best describe him is that of "narrow." His every limb and feature bore out this description. His forehead was high and narrow, his nose was narrow, and his eyes were close together. Indeed, so small was the division made by his nose. that it seemed sometimes as though the man had only one eye. His cheeks were narrow, and

shaped almost like a hatchet. His neck was long and thin, and his shoulders had scarcely any breadth whatever. The same might be said of his chest and loins, while his legs looked so thin that I doubt whether they would have been capable of supporting a well-built man. And yet he was by no means a dwarf. He was as tall as I, indeed he looked taller on account of his very slender build.

His face was somewhat repulsive, not so much on account of the shape of his features, as of the fact that it was disfigured by sword-cuts. Also his eyes were shifty, and his mouth cruel.

He entered the room with a bow and a smile, keeping his left hand on his sword-hilt, while with his right he lifted his hat and waved it in a manner entirely foreign.

"Master Richard Hamstead," he said, with an accent which immediately told me that he was not my own countryman.

"Yes," I replied, "and you come, do you, from my lord Bishop of Winchester?"

The smile on his face became more pronounced.

"Master Richard Hamstead will, I am sure, forgive me if I offer the opinion that no name shall be mentioned save his and my own."

"Willingly," I replied, "but——"

"You do not know my name," he interrupted, showing an even row of small white teeth. "In truth, you cannot know it, and it is necessary you should, for although we be as yet unknown to each other, it is possible we may meet often, and work together."

I looked steadily into his face, waiting for him to proceed, while he fixed his eyes on me as though he would read what kind of man I was.

CHAPTER IV

THE MONK AT ST. PAUL'S CROSS

"SENOR TOLEDO," he said, bowing again, and with another wave of his hat.

"And a Spaniard," I said bluntly, for I had not even at that time great love for the people of that country.

'At Master Richard Hamstead's commands," he said, smiling even more than was his wont.

I was silent, for, in truth, I knew not what to say.

"Master Hamstead doth not, perchance, know my country, or my country's ways," he continued, "and as I speak the English tongue, and know the English ways, it may be pleasing to both if he will speak to me as an Englishman. Ferdinand Toledo," he continued, bowing again, and once more waving his hat.

"It is well, Master Ferdinand Toledo," I replied, "we can perchance converse more freely on those terms. I understand that you come to me bearing a letter from one whose name we agree not to mention."

"I do," he answered.

"Well, will you be pleased to give it me?" I said, for I liked not the way in which he acted.

"Such is my purpose," he replied, his eyes resting on a chair close by my side.

"Will you sit?" I said, noting his action.

He acceded to my request quickly, and then went on speaking.

"Changes will come over your country now," he said.

"Mayhap," I replied.

"And perchance England and Spain may become united. Ah, the two would make a great nation, so great that we could rule the world."

"Mayhap," I repeated bluntly.

"Except for religion," he added.

"Religion?" I queried.

"Yes; think you that England will ever come back to Rome again?"

"We are weary of hot-gospellers," I said.

"Think you so? Think you so? But you should know better than I. I trust I speak no treason, but although I am a Spaniard, I love not persecution in the name of religion."

"A still tongue maketh a wise head," I thought, as I remembered Stephen Gardiner's words.

"Know you the man to whom you go?" he continued.

"I know nothing."

"Doubt you his loyalty?"

"No."

"Ah, it is well. I am told he owns much land, and hath much wealth."

"I know nothing." I felt like asking questions, but I held my peace.

"I love England," he went on, "I love the people. They are strong and brave. You have not the sunny skies of Spain, but it is a fair country. My hope is to spend my life here. I am told that you are not wedded, Master Hamstead;"

"No," I replied.

"But you love? Ah, you love?"

"No," I repeated.

"Is it possible? But you English are colder at heart than the sons of Spain! And this brings a message to my mind which I am commanded to deliver by those who sent me."

He looked at me again with his shifty yet searching eyes, but spoke no word.

"What is the message?"

"That in your mission you avoid all converse with women, and that on no account are you to let your eyes rest with favour on any maid you may chance to meet. You will be regarded as one who betrays a trust if you do. Afterwards, when your work is over,—ah, but there is a fair maid, and a fair fortune for your reward."

Hereupon he rose from his chair and handed me a packet closely sealed.

"This is the letter," he said, bowing again.

I took it and examined it closely, but there was neither name of man nor house written thereon.

"You know to whom to take it, and that is sufficient," he said, his tone somewhat changing I thought, and then he walked away, again bowing and again waving his hat with much ceremony.

Now I must make confession that when the man was gone I was a prey to many forebodings, and many questioning thoughts. For although my mind was captivated by the promise of the reward concerning which he spoke

so glibly, I was vexed at the mystery which surrounded the work I had to do. So full of reflection indeed was I, that for a long time I forgot my intention to go out and see the sights of the city. Getting the better of my thoughts, however, about nine o'clock I went out, having first of all carefully placed the letter inside my doublet, close to my person. I went into Fleet Street, and walking in the direction of St. Paul's passed Fleet prison, situate on the east side of Farringdon Street. I did not stay there, however, for the place had a gloomy effect upon me, so I went up Ludgate Hill towards St. Paul's. The place being open I entered for a few minutes, but noticed nothing save that some priests were engaged in the chapels. The church being but ill-lighted, I turned to go out again, when I heard a hoarse whisper.

Not knowing what it might mean, I stopped and looked around me. I could see nothing, however, for there were many dark spots all around me, so dark that a dozen men might be hiding and yet no one be able to see them. I turned to walk on again when I heard the voice the second time.

"Stop, Richard Hamstead," it said. I stopped accordingly, my heart beating fast, for the hoarse whisper in the old church made me think of the dead rather than of the living. No one spoke, however, and I heard nothing save the voices of the priests as they chanted Latin at the altars.

"It must be my imagination," I said to myself. "Who would speak to me here? No one knows my name. I entered the city unnoticed, and what I thought I heard, is but the echo of the voices of the priests, who are praying for the souls in purgatory."

I crossed myself therefore, and made my way towards the font which held holy water. I had not reached the pillar behind which the font was placed, however, before I again heard my name.

"Stop, Richard Hamstead, for the love of God, stop!"

I stopped again, for this time I felt sure that some human being was near me, and desired converse.

"Beware of everything, of every one, and above all, beware of——"

Here the voice ceased, and on turning around I saw some priests crossing the church. I waited until the sound of their footsteps died away, and then listened again, but I received no further communication. I looked all around me, and peered into dark places, but no one was visible. It seemed to me as though that which I had heard was the voice of the dead, while, as my footsteps echoed through the great building, a great awe fell upon me, such as I do not remember ever having felt before. For while I had but little fear of the living, I feared the dead greatly, and as I thought of souls in torment who might be invading the air around me, I well-nigh lost control of myself, and without more ado, I hurried into the street.

"I will get back to the inn," I cried aloud, glad to be out in the open air, and relieved at the sound of my own voice. I scarcely noticed those who carried lights through the streets, nor the men and women who passed me. I was simply filled with dread on account of the hoarse voice which haunted me.

I did not slacken my pace till I again reached Farringdon Street and stood within the shadow of the gloomy prison, which had lately begun to be used for those who did not conform to the beliefs and usages of the Church, and who, as a consequence, were regarded not only as enemies to God, but as traitors to their queen and country.

"God pity the poor souls who are buried there," I said to myself, "and lead them to confess their errors."

This thought had scarcely passed through my mind when I felt a hand placed upon my arm. I turned and saw a man dressed in monk's raiment, but I could not discern him plainly on account of the dimness of the light.

"I would speak to you, Richard Hamstead," he said.

"Was it you who spoke in St. Paul's but a little while ago?" I asked.

"It was."

I felt relieved, for his presence relieved me of superstitious fears.

"What would you say to me?" I asked.

"Speak low," he said. "The true faith is coming back, but in its train it is bringing spies without number, so

that those things which be spoken in the closet shall be proclaimed on the house-top."

I was silent.

"You have but lately left your home," he whispered close to my ear, "and you carry your head high. You have great hopes, and fair promises have been made to you."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"It doth not matter," was the reply, "sufficient that I do."

"Well, and what then?" I asked impatiently, for in truth I was not too well pleased to be stopped in this way.

"Beware," said the monk in a low whisper; "trust no man; above all," and he put his mouth close to my ear, "trust no Spaniard."

I started.

"You are but a lamb among wolves," he went on, "but as a hare among hounds, and you know not what you do. Go home, Richard Hamstead, go home and seek not the ways of the world."

"Who are you, and by what right do you speak?" I asked.

"It doth not matter whom I am, nor what I am. I ask nothing from you, not even a mug of ale, although I need one right sorely."

"I cannot listen to every stranger who may speak," I said loftily, "my work hath naught to do with you."

"And you will continue in your work?"

"That's as may be," I continued in the same tone. "Go to your prayers, Master Monk, and leave those who have work to do to their own devices, or else speak plainly."

"I may not speak plainly here, in truth I may not speak plainly at all, but walk with me towards the Market, it is darker there, and fewer will see us."

I walked forward without a word, a sense of my own importance growing at each step, but my mind much confused all the same.

"You will do what you set out to do?" said the monk.

"Aye, that I will," was my answer.

"Then be as wise as a serpent, as a serpent. Again I

say, trust no man. Avoid especially the Spaniard, and if you value your own life, do not be at cross purposes with," here he lowered his voice, and placed his mouth close against my ear again, "with the man at whose name all England will tremble a year from now."

"What know you of the man?" I asked.

"Know! Know! I have reason to know. But let that pass. It is but of little use trying to check the hastiness of youth, yet I followed you for that reason."

"But for what purpose?" I asked, "what is my welfare to you? Tell me your name, and tell me also how you know mine."

"Mayhap I shall some day," he said, "and when I do, you shall know why I have spoken to you to-night. Even now, I would, if I could, dissuade you from going—whither you have decided to go. I tell you that peril, dire peril, attends your mission. No matter which side you take; it is still the same. It means putting your head in a lion's mouth. For the love of your father, and of your fair sister, return home."

"Master Monk," I said more kindly, for I could not help but see that he was truly sincere, "it is evident from those words that you speak in ignorance. For the sake of those you speak of, I must do that which I have set out to do. It is honourable work, and well-fitted for the son who bears a good father's name."

"Honourable work, honourable! Poor boy, poor boy!" he said sadly.

"Aye, who dares say otherwise?" I cried angrily.

"It will not avail," he said, as if speaking to himself, "nothing will avail. May God help him."

"Speak plainly, Master Monk," I said, "I am not good at riddles."

"Master Richard Hamstead, bear in mind what I have told you," he replied, "beware of all men, and especially beware of that narrow-shouldered shark, the Spaniard, and take care that neither by word nor deed you cross the man who holds us all in his power."

"I will pay heed to that," I said, "for I believe you speak fairly."

"I do, I do, I may not tell you more, I dare not. Even now, even now——" and the man shivered, but did not finish what he had begun to say.

"But mind this, Richard Hamstead, you may need a friend, you may need a shelter in the storm. If you do, do this, and you may do worse. Come to a little street called St. Paul's Hill. It is poor, and short, and narrow. Stop at the third door and knock three times. A woman an old woman, will open the door, and if you say, 'A cup of cold water,' she will understand, and admit you. I cannot say more. Good-bye, and may God protect you."

A minute later the man was lost in the darkness, while I, wondering greatly, walked back to the tavern where I lodged and went to bed. I was much excited at the day's events, nevertheless I fell asleep quickly, and awoke early next morning, prepared to commence my journey.

CHAPTER V

MY WELCOME AT BARCROFT HALL

NOTHING happened during my journey to Brentwood, although I fully expected something out of the ordinary to take place. The truth was, my encounter with the monk had much disturbed me. How did he know me, and more, how did he get an inkling of the work upon which I was engaged? What reason had he to warn me of Ferdinand Toledo, and of Stephen Gardiner? And thus, because no reasonable answer came to these questions, I conjectured all sorts of wild solutions, only to become more and more confused.

As I said, however, nothing happened. The weather, although cold, was fine, and Phœbe carried me as though I were a feather. I was much pleased at the respect paid me by the peasants, the which I attributed to the finery which I wore, and the handsome mare I bestrode. Often as I rode along, I fingered my sword-hilt lovingly, and sometimes almost wished that some highwayman would

attack me, so that I might show him the stuff of which I was made.

Although I rode briskly, the day was beginning to die when I passed through Brentwood, and by the time I reached Barcroft Hall night had set in. Still the moon gave a fair light, and I found my way to my destination without difficulty. In fact, the place was well known, and although, because I had lived a home-life, seldom going beyond the bounds of my father's estate, I knew little of the great ones of England, I quickly discovered that Master Godfrey Bedford was a personage of no small importance. Indeed, men spoke of him freely as a friend to the poor, and a helper to all in distress. His place of residence, too, was very imposing; and I saw that the porter at the outer gates was clad in a gay livery, becoming only to the retainers of a man of rank.

When I reached the house, two dogs started barking as if savage at my approach, while a man of huge stature came towards me, and in no pleasant voice asked me my business.

"My business is with Master Godfrey Bedford," I answered haughtily, assuming, as I thought, the airs necessary to my station.

"Master Godfrey Bedford seeth not every nameless stranger who knocks at his gates," replied the man. "Your name, young sir, and your reasons for seeing him."

"Master Richard Hamstead," I answered, hoping that my father was known beyond the neighbourhood of Barnet. But in this I was disappointed. The man gave no sign of recognition.

"Who may Master Richard Hamstead be?" he asked scornfully.

"Suffice for you to know that he hath affairs of importance to discuss with your master, varlet," I answered angrily.

"Methinks the affairs will have to wait awhile, Master Richard Hamstead," replied the man, mimicking my voice.

"Fellow," I said, "if you wish not a broken pate, nor desire a horse-whipping from your master, announce me forthwith."

The man laughed in my face, but gave no other answer.

I placed my hand upon my sword-hilt, and was on the point of drawing it, when I reflected that I should do little good by such a course of procedure. It was possible that the place was beset with spies, and if Master Godfrey Bedford had enemies, as doubtless he had, he would give careful warnings concerning the admission of unknown travellers.

"Look you, varlet," I said, "you will repent yourself of this, and that before you are many hours older. I have letters to Master Bedford, from those who——" then I stopped in confusion, for I remembered Stephen Gardiner's words.

"Let me see them," he replied.

"I deliver them into no hands but those of your master," I replied. "Think you that messages of importance be given to every serving-man who happens to be insolent? Look you, lackey," I continued, for my anger was getting the better of me, "if you do not announce me forthwith, I will break your head, and then will force my way to your master's presence."

Whether my voice made him feel I was in earnest, or whether he reflected that he was carrying his vigilance too far, I wot not; certain it is, he changed his tone, and with a half-suspicious look, led the way to the entrance-hall.

A few minutes later I was waiting in an ante-room, while Phœbe stood pawing the stones in the courtyard.

"I expected not this," I said to myself as I paced the room, "and I will surely let Master Bedford know that I am ill-pleased with my reception." And so when the servant came to say that Master Bedford would see me, I followed him with no pleasant thoughts in my mind. I had gone but a few steps, however, when I forgot that my pride had been wounded, for crossing the hall I beheld a picture which to my youthful imagination was the fairest I had ever beheld. It was that of a maiden who looked a year or two younger than myself and who was evidently a member of the household, for the servant who conducted me made obeisance right humbly, and looked at

her, I thought, with eyes filled with reverence and love.

On seeing me she stopped suddenly, and lifted her eyes to mine, then dropped them in some confusion.

"Whom have we here, Nicholas?" she said, like one who uttered words against her will.

"It is one Master Richard Hamstead, who declareth himself to be a person of quality having business of importance with your noble father, Mistress Faith," replied the man.

I bowed lowly as he uttered my name, but Mistress Faith gave me no heed. Rather she averted her face, as though annoyed that she had deigned to notice me, and then hurried away.

Her manner did not flatter me, rather she seemed vexed because she had taken notice of me, and yet, as I said, her presence drove the rudeness of the serving-man whom I had first encountered out of my mind. Indeed, I went far to forget my mission to Master Bedford, and even as I followed the serving-man, whom she had called Nicholas, I conjectured many things about her.

Even now the memory of her face and form comes back to me as I write, and I call to mind her every movement as though it all happened yesterday.

She was above the medium height, and shaped with much beauty. Men in after years compared her form with that of the young Princess Elizabeth. But her face bore no likeness to that of the great queen who now sits on England's throne. It is true her hair was somewhat light in colour; but it cannot be described easily. To me, it looked as though her locks were of a rich brown, burnished with gold. It grew in great profusion too, and it gleamed with great brilliance in the lamplight. Her forehead looked low, and her eyes were soft and grey. I have seen them other than soft though. Men have quailed before them to my knowledge, especially when she was aroused from the gentle habit which was her nature. Her other features were like those of the Greek goddesses which I have seen in pictures and in statuary, and her skin was free from all spot or blemish.

Perchance I may be accused of using extravagant words,

but I put down on paper the memory of a wondrous beauty which impressed me that night when I was but a boy, and knew but little of the ways of the world. Even when a few minutes later I stood before Master Godfrey Bedford, her presence seemed to remain with me, although I saw at a glance that the Master of Barcroft Hall was not a man to be treated lightly.

"Master Richard Hamstead," he said sharply as I entered, his dark eyes resting keenly upon me.

"At your service, Master Godfrey Bedford," I answered.

"You would speak with me on matters of importance, I am told," he said.

"So please you," I replied.

He continued to look at me steadily, so steadily that I felt as if I must drop my eyes before his, even as the sword of a weak swordsman falls before that of his master. But I mastered myself with an effort, and gave him look for look. For was I not his friend? Had I not come to establish his innocence in the face of those who had impeached his loyalty?

"Will you be pleased to state what those matters be?" he said presently, sitting back in his chair, as though he had made up his mind to hear me patiently.

I made answer by taking the letter which had been handed me by Senor Toledo, and placing it in his hands.

"Who gave you this?" he asked sharply.

"The letter itself will explain," I said, remembering Stephen Gardiner's words.

He broke the seal hastily and read the letter with much care. Then, as if failing to be satisfied, he scanned it a second time, taking occasional looks at me as he did so.

"My friend, Sir George Burton, speaks of you as the only son of an honest man, a good swordsman, and a man who can be useful at all times," he said slowly.

Now, I did not know who Sir George Burton might be. I had never heard his name, and therefore could not see how he could write concerning me. I held my tongue, however, for I bore Stephen Gardiner's words in mind; all the same, I was puzzled greatly.

"Know you aught of soldiering, Master Hamstead?"

"Naught, save what I have picked up by a study of battles."

"You have never been in active service?"

"Never."

"Ah well, you are yet young," and then he read the missive again.

Presently he rose from his chair and paced the room. He was a tall, strong man, in the prime of life, say forty-five or forty-seven years of age. He wore a beard, and his moustachios were curled after the Spanish fashion, and I noticed that while his garb was of rich material, it was plainer than ordinary among men of degree.

"As you know naught of soldiering, I judge that you are also ignorant of aught that pertains to matters of State."

I bowed in silence, for although I prided myself that I knew much, I remembered that I had been commanded to be silent.

"This letter says you desire to become a man of action."

"Yes, Master Bedford," I said, "such is my wish."

"Better not, young man, better not. The ways of State are often crooked and stony. Go back to your father's house, look well after your servants and tenants, and live in peace."

This he said slowly, keeping his eyes fixed on me keenly.

"Not so, if it please you," I answered. "I am tired of the useless life of a country squire; and I long to do something for my country."

"Well, well, young blood is hot, and perchance your desire is natural," he made answer. "At any rate, we shall see. We shall see. Meanwhile, I bid you welcome, Master Hamstead. You shall stay with us awhile, and if—well, God only knows what the future may bring forth. But you know our motto: 'a still tongue maketh a wise head.'"

A minute later a serving-man entered the room, who led the way to a bedroom where a little later those articles of clothing which I had brought were deposited.

A little later I was summoned to the evening meal, and I made my way with no slight trepidation to the dining-

hall, a huge room where some twenty people had gathered. I had some difficulty at first in clearly seeing the people who were in the room, for the lights were insufficient to dispel the darkness in such a huge apartment. I saw them more clearly at length, however, especially when the logs of wood in the great fire-place burst into a flame.

When Master Godfrey Bedford caught sight of me he beckoned me to his side, and then, while those who were in the room looked towards him, he spoke aloud so that all in the room might hear.

"This is Master Richard Hamstead," he said, "a young man of honourable family who hath come bearing a letter from our good friend Sir George Burton. I pray you all to welcome him heartily as I have done."

There was, as I thought, a slight murmur of welcome among those present, and then we fell to eating the supper which was set before us, and which I, being right hungry, enjoyed hugely. After a time, however, I fell to scanning the faces of those around me, and I saw that with but very few exceptions, all were men much older than myself. There was no free speaking, the which I attributed to the fact that ladies were present. Neither was much wine drunk, as was the custom of the time, at which I somewhat wondered, for it was not ordinary to refrain from drinking, even before the ladies had withdrawn.

I was not long in seeing Mistress Faith, who sat close by a lady who I judged was her mother, owing to the resemblance which I saw between them. Near her, moreover, was another maiden, demure of countenance, but still fair of face, whom I judged to be some three or four years older than Mistress Faith. Later I heard, that her name was Leah Varley.

When supper was over another surprise awaited me. The men did not stay a minute over their wine, but rose up silently, and went their ways as though they had duties to perform; so that in the space of a few minutes the great dining-hall was nearly empty, only Master Bedford and two men of his own age remaining.

"Ours is a quiet household," said he to me, "and doubtless, after your day's ride, you will desire to rest. Per-

chance to-morrow I may desire to speak with you at length."

With that he turned to the men who remained with him, and I, astonished at my curt dismissal, turned to leave the room.

"What is the meaning of this?" I asked myself. "I am received as a guest, and yet I am not a guest. Who is this Sir George Burton, I wonder, and what hath he written concerning me? I like not this mystery. One might think I was suspected of being a spy in their midst, instead of a friend."

CHAPTER VI

I ATTEND A MEETING OF REBELS

FOR the next few days I lived a perfectly uneventful life. The words which I expected Master Godfrey Bedford to speak to me were never uttered. I was asked no questions, neither was any service required of me. Men were constantly coming and going, but they took no notice of me. Each night there was a great gathering at supper, but nothing of interest was said. Immediately on finishing the meal the men left the room silently, and went I knew not whither. Only one change took place, and that was that the women absented themselves. In truth, I saw during several days, neither Mistress Bedford, Mistress Faith, nor the demure maiden who seemed, as I thought, anxious to acquaint herself with me on the night of my arrival.

I was allowed perfect liberty. No one questioned me, and no one returned answer to my questions. I wandered around the country-side, but no man had aught to tell me. I visited the wayside inn which stood not far from the gates of Barcroft Hall, but those who frequented the place were ignorant clowns who knew naught of the way the world wagged.

No man seemed to regard my stay at the Hall as curious. I displayed my finery, but it passed, as I thought, unno-

ticed, until I much wearied of my sojourn. I formed many conjectures concerning Mistress Faith and Mistress Leah, but they did not show themselves. I thought I saw them gazing one day from an upper room, but I was not sure. Truly, my mission had become mysterious. Several times I bethought myself of leaving, and going back to Stephen Gardiner to tell him Master Godfrey Bedford was a stupid country clown, who had no interests beyond the management of his own lands. But on reflection I saw that this would not satisfy the stern Bishop, neither would it bring me the favour I desired. Besides, I was not altogether satisfied that such was the case, for although those who gathered night after night spoke concerning naught of interest, I could not help feeling that I was surrounded by an air of mystery.

Another thing struck me forcibly. Never once had I seen a priest within the walls. There was a chapel at the Hall, but as far as I could judge, it was never used. It is true a man of grave demeanour and quiet voice sometimes came thither, but he did not wear the garb of a cleric, neither did he, as far as I could see, take part in any religious ceremony. In addition to all this, I could see that I was regarded with no great favour. No man smiled on me, and no man greeted me with kindness. All this made me right weary, and I wished that the great Bishops had chosen a man who loved not active life, but utter quietness and gloom.

Although but a few hours' ride from London, I knew naught of what passed there. I heard ominous stories of changes that were taking place in the town of Brentwood; indeed, I gathered that the priests of the ancient Church had ejected those who had conducted services according to the rites which had been established during the time of the young king. But even of this I knew nothing certain, for Brentwood was more than ten miles away, and I felt I could do but little good by going thither to inquire.

So weary did I become that one night as I went to bed, I made up my mind that I would seek out Master Godfrey Bedford the next day, and ask him why I was treated with apparent suspicion, and then take action accordingly.

This determination gave me much pleasure, for I loved action and hated idleness.

This plan I never carried into effect, however, for the next day I saw that something out of the ordinary was afoot. Men rode to the house in hot haste, and held hasty consultations in whispers, and I judged from the look on their faces, that they discussed grave matters.

I tried hard to obtain knowledge of the purport thereof, but whenever I approached, silence reigned, or the most trivial commonplaces were discussed. This aroused my suspicions greatly, indeed I was fast coming to the conclusion that the great Bishops were mistaken in Master Godfrey Bedford, and that treason was afoot.

As evening came on, I noticed that large numbers of men had arrived from different quarters. I saw, too, that they all came singly, and many had apparently come from across country.

Only one conversation of any interest reached me, and that was to the effect that the mouth of the river was very rough, and that if there were such a gale in the river it would be impossible for a boat to live in the open sea.

From this I gathered that these men had come from Kent, or else what reason should they have to speak about the roughness of the river? Anyhow, as I said, when night came there must have been at least fifty men in the Hall, and all were well armed, as though they had prepared to meet an enemy.

It was at this time that Master Godfrey Bedford came to me.

"Master Richard Hamstead, you have had many days of idleness, the time for action hath now come."

"That is good news," I made answer, and yet for the life of me I could not understand what there was to do.

"Sir George Burton's letter described you as a good swordsman and a capable youth," he went on. "The country is in need of such, and this night you are to be admitted to the councils of those who would save the land from ruin."

I spoke no word, but I suppose my looks must have assented to his words, for he led the way to a part of the

house into which I had never been admitted, keeping his hand upon my arm all the time. We passed through a long passage, and then descended some steps until I concluded that we were far beneath the level of the earth.

"I knew not this part of the house," I said, almost timidly, for by this time my mind was filled with suspicion.

"No," he said, with a laugh; but he uttered no other word until he had touched a spring which caused a great door to be rolled back, and then I beheld a large room where many men had congregated. No sooner had we entered than I heard a clang behind me, and I felt as though I was in a gloomy prison.

Evidently Master Bedford was regarded as a man of great importance, for men instantly made way for him as he went to a kind of platform at the end of the dungeon, for such it seemed to me, although it was a spacious place, capable of holding at a pinch two hundred men. Arrived at the platform, Master Bedford rose to speak, and then a great silence fell, so great was it that I could plainly hear the beating of my own heart.

"Brave comrades," said Master Bedford, "it rejoiceth me much to see such a loyal band of men together beneath my roof. And although we have to meet somewhat secretly, because of the unhappy times upon which we have fallen, we are not ashamed of the cause which hath brought us together. Rather, we glory in it. But of that I need not speak, all hearts here, I trust, beat as one, our great desire being the good of our land, and the advancement of true religion."

At this there was a murmur of approbation among the men, while I thought I saw suspicious eyes turned towards myself.

"Before we consider the line of action which must be immediately taken," went on Master Bedford, "it will be well for all to know what hath been done, and what is being, at the present time, carried out.

At this a man who had evidently ridden hard, for his jerkin and boots were much bespattered with mud, rose to speak.

"Much is done, worshipful sir," he said, "many thou-

sands there be who are prepared to resist our having aught to do with the Spaniards, aye, and for that purpose have given their names to——"

Before he could conclude his speech another man arose.

"Is it well to speak freely at this moment," he said. "Hath the oath been taken this night, as on other nights, to prove that no spy, no enemy to our cause, is here in our midst? Methinks I see a stranger, who, if I am not mistaken, hath not been tested, and who ought not yet to hear what we have to say."

At this the eyes of many more were turned on me, some with great anger, and I heard a general murmur of assent to what the man had said.

"There is not one present but whose loyalty to our cause hath been proved, or who hath been recommended from safe quarters," said Master Bedford.

"But we know that false letters have been written," replied the man boldly, "and we must bear in mind that Gardiner is as cunning as the devil."

"That is true," said Master Bedford, "but all who are here are in our power. Before we leave, all must again take the oath, and should there be one present who is not fully aware of our purposes, then it will be necessary that they should be fully explained before he swears allegiance."

"But if there is one who will not swear?"

"Then he must be held as a traitor, and treated accordingly. Master William Carew, tell us what hath been done."

CHAPTER VII

I REFUSE TO TAKE THE OATH OF WYATT'S REBELS

I SAW that my head was in a lion's mouth, but I did not cry out. I saw that I could do no good by speaking, and, moreover, with all the eagerness of youth, I longed to know what was in these men's minds. I remembered, moreover, that Stephen Gardiner had told me that I might hear many things which were strange, and that I must act as though I fully expected them. I reflected that I could not do

this ; but that I could wait patiently, and if I fell into a trap I must trust to my wits to get out of it. Nevertheless, I was much excited, and I fairly held my breath when the man called William Carew started to speak again.

" I have to report that, against my will, a movement is afoot to silence for ever the tongue of the foulest enemy England ever had. For he is a foul enemy. Cardinal Wolsey was but a lamb compared with that wolf-cub, his pupil, Stephen Gardiner, or Dr. Stephens, whatever men may call him. Still, child of Satan though he be, I have done all in my power to check the movement. We be not murderers, but soldiers and gentlemen."

" He deserveth to die," cried several voices. " It is he who is trying to bring back the six articles, it is he who will burn the Protestants, and it is he who, in spite of those who say otherwise, is seeking to wed Mary with that Spanish cub, Philip."

" All that may be true," said Master Bedford, still, as William Carew hath said, we be not murderers but soldiers. When Mary is dethroned, and the true queen reigns, he must be closely imprisoned, but we cannot counsel his assassination. Will they succeed, think you ? "

" No, I trow not. Those who are in this movement act without caution or reason. I know, too, that Gardiner hath heard of their plot, and hath taken precautions."

" Renard is almost as dangerous as Gardiner," said Master Bedford ; " hath he an inkling, know you, Master Tremayne, of our designs ? "

" No man knoweth," replied a giant of a man, who evidently hailed from the west country. " Gardiner hath his suspicions, but they be as vague as sea-mist. He is using a thousand means to find out, each more cunning than the other, but he knoweth nothing. No preparations are being made, and when we march, Mary's throne will fall like a sand-castle before the waves."

" Speak you with authority, Master Tremayne ? " asked Godfrey Bedford.

" I have this day come from London. I have spoken with those who are in favour at Court. I learnt that many steps are being taken for the putting down of those who believe in

the reformed religion. In truth, if we do not strike quickly, a bloody inquisition will be witnessed in England such as was never known before. And this I say boldly, for Parliament is yielding to every whim of the queen, and the queen, goaded on by Gardiner, hath determined that all who will not conform shall be burnt with fire, or thrown like carrion to the filth-heap. To strengthen her in this she seeks alliance with Philip, and is already communicating with the Bishop of Rome, with the intent that England shall be again under his control. All this I learnt, but no man knoweth of our designs. Sir Thomas Wyatt hath gathered together a brave army in Kent, and he dependeth on us for five hundred swords. But concerning that, Roger Williams knows more than I."

On that a man of solemn countenance arose, and told how Sir Thomas Wyatt was almost ready for action, and that some of the greatest names in the kingdom were mentioned in connection with his army. He moreover declared that Wyatt would issue his proclamation, and lift his standard at Rochester, and that they must hourly expect a messenger bidding them thither.

Much of this nature was spoken, until the whole plot was made plain to me. I saw that not only was not Master Bedford loyal to the queen, but that he was the leader of a movement for revolt in Essex, and that the country was on the eve of a civil war. Every word that was spoken, moreover, revealed my danger to me, and told me that I had unwittingly been led into a den of rebels.

Presently Godfrey Bedford spoke again, and each man paid great heed, for all seemed to regard him as a man of great mind, and a great leader.

"We must act as though all but sworn friends be enemies," he said. "Above all, we must see to it that Stephen Gardiner knows naught. If he discovers but the alphabet of our plans, he will know all. Ever since the first month after Queen Jane was thrown into the Tower he hath regarded me as his enemy. So fully convinced is he, that he hath taken untold measures to bring me to book, but in each case I have outwitted him. Young and old, wise and simple, man and maid, men of honour and knaves, all in turn hath he

enlisted in his service. But enough of that, we are ready. There remaineth but one duty to perform before we scatter. The oath of allegiance must again be taken."

I had been a blind, miserable fool! I saw it now, saw it plainly. Stephen Gardiner had intended me as a spy. It was not his purpose that I should prove the honour of a loyal man, but discover his treason. He had played upon my foolishness, my vanity, my pride, and my fond ambitions, even as a cunning player plays upon the harp. He had so framed his request, that I, a foolish boy, did not see that I was intended as an informer, a spy, a pryer into men's secrets, but rather, that I was engaged upon a work of mercy, a work of vindicating an honourable man's honour. He had used me simply as an arrow shot at a venture. I was one of his many tools, a puppet moved at this man's will.

I had but little time to think, however, for Master Godfrey Bedford rose, and as president of the gathering, took the oath first. I almost shuddered as I heard him pronounce the words, for to me they seemed binding as death itself. He swore that he would use every means in his power to dethrone Mary, that he would give time, substance, and even life itself. He swore that he would be true to his oath, and would never betray it either by deed, word, or sign. Then he prayed that he might suffer the most terrible doom both here and hereafter, if he became a traitor.

After he had taken the oath, others were called to do the same, and for the sake of time, the formalities were shortened, so that in a few minutes each man in the gathering had rebound himself to the cause of insurrection. Then came my turn, and when Master Bedford called me to the place where he sat, I felt as though my heart was rising to my throat.

"Master Richard Hamstead," said Bedford, "each man hath taken the oath save you. You have been well recommended to me, by a letter purporting to come from Sir George Burton, and this night you have been admitted into our most secret councils. Now, before you leave the room it is necessary that you should bind yourself as all the others have done."

I could hardly get out the words, but by a mighty effort I uttered them.

"No, Master Godfrey Bedford," I said, "I will not take the oath."

A great silence fell upon the room as I spoke, a silence like unto the silence of death.

"Think, Master Hamstead, think before you refuse. You came here as a friend, strongly recommended by a friend. Why do you refuse?"

"Because it is the oath of a traitor," I said.

"Then why did you bring the letter of one whom you call a traitor?"

"I did not know by whom it was written." This I said unwittingly, for in truth I was much wrought upon.

"Did not know by whom it was written? Ah, then you must know who sent you?"

I was silent.

"Who sent you here, Master Hamstead, and who gave you the letter without which you would not have been admitted?"

Still I continued silent, for although I was sore vexed with Stephen Gardiner, I would not speak his name.

"You will not tell me, then?" he said.

"No, I will not tell you!" I cried, for my fear had gone now, and I was ready to face anything.

"A spy, a spy!" men cried all around me.

"He that says I came here as a spy is a liar," I cried, glaring around me, "and I am ready to prove it at the point of the sword."

"Then if you came not here as a spy, tell us why you came," said Master Bedford, who was the only man who seemed to remain calm.

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him, but I reflected that by so doing I should lay myself open to other questions, which would surely drag in the names of the men who had bidden me never, by any chance, to mention them. All the same, I could not altogether hold my peace.

"I came here, as to a loyal gentleman," I made answer, "and I expected to meet none but those who would stand by Church and queen. Instead, I have been dragged into the

midst of a hornet's nest. Such surroundings suit me not. Let me go in peace."

"Aye, to prate about what you have seen and heard," cried voices all around me.

"You seem to be a man of honour, Master Richard Hamstead, even although appearances be against you," said Master Bedford, in a kindly voice. "Although you will not speak plainly, I know enough of the man who sent you, to believe that he would use you, as he hath used many others, as a senseless tool. You came here blindfolded, even as many a fool hath gone elsewhere. I thought I saw this on the night you came. Still, I have given you a chance, and I tell you plainly, boy, you will be wise to use it."

I shook my head, but remained silent.

"I tell you," he went on, "Queen Mary will be in the Tower three months from now, and all England will rejoice that she is there. As for Stephen Gardiner and Bonner, well, God will hold them in remembrance. There will be a sad future for those who hold to the throne as it now stands. Think again, and take the oath. Strike a blow for the freedom of England from foreign tyranny, help to save us from such a fate as hath befallen those who love liberty in that accursed land of Spain."

"It may be as you say, Master Bedford," I said, "but God help me, I will never lift up my hand against the throne. God intended Mary to be queen, and hath smiled on her reign. Her people welcomed her with gladness of heart, and it is traitor's work to fight against her."

At this there was again a great outcry, but Godfrey Bedford silenced them by the uplifting of his hand.

"I would deal gently with you, for you are but young," he said. "You asked just now to go in peace. If I yielded to you, and promised to let you go as freely as you came, will you take an oath never to make known either by deed, word, or sign, what this night you have seen or heard?"

"No, Master Bedford, I will not," I answered.

"Let him die, as a spy should," men shouted all around me, and I knew that had they but their way they would make short work of me. But Godfrey Bedford did not yield to them.

"I tell you plainly," he said, "you are but making a noose for your own neck. You can do no good by being obstinate, and I would be merciful."

The man's kindness influenced me much; but I could not yield. I was sore angry because of my own blindness and thick-headedness. I had lived amongst them like a fool; had I kept but half an eye open I should have discovered their purposes, and kept my freedom at the same time. But I had been like a bat. In my hatred of being a spy I had acted like one bereft of his wits. All the same, I determined not to add treason to foolishness. I was there as the trusted servant of the Queen's Chancellor, and I knew I should never dare to hold up my head again if I went over to the enemy. I repeated my refusal, and prepared myself for the worst.

"You will not even promise to hold your tongue then?" said Master Bedford.

"No," I cried, "were I at liberty, I would ride to London and proclaim what I know."

At this I thought the men all around would have rushed upon me, but Master Bedford held them in check.

"Then you are a prisoner," he said to me, when he had obtained silence.

"Prisoners escape; better let him die," shouted many. "He is the spy of Gardiner; let him die!"

"He shall not escape," said Master Bedford firmly. "He hath not the brains. But he is a brave lad, though a fool. He shall be imprisoned till the time when prating can do no harm."

With that two strong men got hold of me, and a few moments later I was in a stone cell which I judged was on the same level as the great room from which I had been taken.

For a few hours I was too stunned to think clearly, for although I tried to piece events together, I was unable to do so. My head swam, and there was a great noise in my ears, just as though I were under water.

The place was in total darkness, save for a little moonlight which came through a grating situate at the level of the ceiling of my prison, but I heeded neither darkness nor

light. Presently I became too weary even to make an effort to think, and when, after a long time, I threw myself on a bed which had been put for me, I felt myself falling asleep.

When I awoke it was broad daylight. This I saw by the stream of light which came through the grating, so I got up quickly and looked around me.

My sleep had restored me wondrously. My mind was clear again, and my wits active, and immediately I fell to thinking how I might escape from my prison. I sprang to the grating and tried to remove the iron bars, but they yielded not one bit to my utmost strength, and then I sat down again and tried to understand my condition.

A few minutes later a man came, bringing me food. This I ate heartily, for it was tastily prepared, and of good quality; whereupon my heart grew warm to Godfrey Bedford.

For two days and two nights I was kept in my cell, during which time I made a thousand plans for my freedom, each as futile as the other. All day long I heard the sound of footsteps near me, and often the whispering of voices. Evidently I was well guarded, and try as I might, I saw no way whereby my captivity might be brought to an end.

At the end of two days, however, the sound of footsteps ceased, and I judged from the great silence which abounded that Barcroft Hall was empty. I judged that Wyatt must have summoned Master Bedford to Rochester, and this set me thinking afresh how I might gain my liberty. But I might as well have saved myself the pains, for the door was as strong as the gates in the Tower of London, while a weasel would have found it hard to get through the window, even although the iron grating were pulled away.

Then suddenly a plan was born in my mind which was so simple that I wondered that I had not thought of it before, a plan which had to be acted upon the moment I had conceived it, for at that moment I heard a key placed in the door of my prison.

CHAPTER VIII

HOW I ESCAPED FROM BARCROFT HALL

I WAITED quietly, as I heard the bolt shoot back, and nerved myself for a struggle. From the fact that I had heard neither footsteps nor voices for many hours, I hoped that only one man would be set to guard me. If such were the case I prided myself that I could make short work of him, and find means of setting myself at liberty. While many men were about, this was impossible, but now I was filled with a great hope.

No sooner did the door open, however, than my plans flew to the winds, for I saw, not the gaoler, but the hooded form of a woman. I judged, however, by the fact that the door was pulled to quickly, that a guard waited on the outside, so that at the slightest signal from within the warder would enter.

The woman carried a candle in one hand, and held up the other as if to command silence.

"Master Richard Hamstead," said the woman in a whisper.

"Yes, Richard Hamstead," I replied, "and penned up like a rat in a trap."

"Would you have your liberty?" she asked. "Would you leave this house and be free?"

I thought I recognised the voice. It was not familiar to me, neither was it altogether strange.

"What is the use of answering?" I said warily. "I have already been offered liberty at the cost of honour, and—well, I do not care to pay the price."

"But have you thought? have you considered?"

"Yes, I have thought," I replied; "but who are you? Who sent you here?"

"I am a friend, Master Hamstead."

I hesitated a second. None but a member of the family could enter. The place was guarded as safely as Fleet Prison. Then in a flash it came to me who my visitor was.

"Mistress Faith Bedford," I cried eagerly.

"Hush, was the answer, "hush, utter no names."

But I knew I was right, and my heart warmed strangely as she spoke.

"Master Hamstead," she went on, "you are in danger of your life."

"Yes," I said, remembering the look on the faces of some of the men on the night of the council meeting, "yes, I can believe it."

"An inkling hath come to the Chancellor's ears of what hath been done," she said, "and many believe that you have sent information."

"It is a lie," I cried, "a lie. I have told nothing, I knew nothing until the night I was made a prisoner here."

"John Tremayne——that is," and she stammered somewhat, "that is, some of my father's friends say they have it on good authority, that you have sent information to the Chancellor, which will make him prepare against danger. If it turns out that you have, they will kill you."

"I have not, I have not," I cried.

"Have you enemies?" she asked eagerly.

"I know of none," I answered.

"There be spies at every turn," she said plaintively, "even the innocent have to suffer for the lies of others."

"What mean you?" I asked.

"I mean this, that if you are not out of this place in a few hours you will be killed."

My heart grew cold at her words, for I loved life, and although I am not a coward, I feared the thought of death, especially the death of one regarded as a spy.

"By whom?" I said.

"By those who would save England from the Spaniards."

"But your father——" I stammered.

"He can do nothing more. But for him you would have been dead ere this. Plans have been made useless, and victory more difficult by a spy, and many believe it is you. My father hath prevailed on them to delay taking vengeance on you until inquiries have been made, but I much fear the result."

"Then why come here, Mistress Faith, why mock me?" I asked bitterly.

"Hush," she whispered, "mention not my name. I come to offer you liberty.

"When?" I cried.

"Now at this very hour. If you will make me a promise, you shall go freely."

"What promise?"

"The promise which my father asked you to make."

"But what is the need of it, if all I know has been told?"

"All you know hath not been told. Only a part. I believe what you say. I believe you have told nothing. Give me your word as a man of honour, that you will leave England to-night, and you shall be free."

"Leave England!"

"A boat will be waiting at the river-side, near the village of Grays, which will take you to a vessel which sails for France in a few hours. All I want is your promise."

I was silent, for temptation was strong upon me.

"Quick, your answer?" she said, "there is no time to waste."

The struggle was severe, but I could not give her the answer she expected.

"No, Mistress Faith," I said, "no, you offer a coward's portion, and a traitor's to boot. Even if I escaped, I should for ever be ashamed to show my face in England again. My father and my sister Celia would look upon me with loathing. I have been a sore fool, but I will not be a knave as well."

"But if you were at liberty, and had made no promise. What then?"

"I would make it my business to bring traitors to book," I answered. "I would ride to London town as fast as my good mare could carry me, and I would tell of those who are enemies to the queen,"

"You would tell of my father?"

"I would be an honourable man," I made answer. "I would be true to those who sent me on my mission," This I said boldly, although my heart bled all the time.

The maid's hood had slipped from her, and in the dim candle-light I saw her face. It was very pale, and as I thought, drawn with pain. And yet she was very fair to look upon, more fair than anyone I had ever seen. Her great grey eyes, too, were full of tenderness and sympathy.

"You would mention my father's name when he hath done his utmost to save your life," she said, why, now he——" and then she stopped like one who was making an unwise confession.

"Look you, Mistress Faith," I said, "I will speak freely, though, mayhap, I am a fool in doing so. I came not to spy upon your father. Not to prove his guilt, but his loyalty. It has been reported to those in high places that he breathed forth treason, and that as a consequence he was in danger. I was told that it was not believed by those who have his welfare at heart, and that it was for me to come here and assure myself that he was loyal to the queen. I came here believing in your father's innocence, and was for ever on the look-out for evidence of the fact. To do this I even shut my eyes to things which appeared suspicious, I acted the part of a fool. The rest you know."

The maid was silent, as if she knew not what answer to make.

"Now," I went on, "I know him to be a traitor, he is Sir Thomas Wyatt's right-hand man. He hath provided five hundred men to fight against the queen. I love not the Spaniards, but it shall never be said that I aided, even by silence, those who did rebel's work."

"You are mad, mad," she said, "besides, you were intended as a spy, tricked to become a spy. You owe no allegiance to such."

"Two blacks do not make one white, Mistress Faith," I answered. "I made my promise, and I will be true to it."

"But, think, you can do no good by——by——"

"At least I can die as becometh an honest man," I said with a touch of bravado, which I was far from feeling. "All the same, I thank you, Mistress Faith. Whatever happens to me I shall be grateful that you tried to give me my liberty. If I die, I shall die happier because of it. If I

live, then you will have a friend always ready to serve you."

I saw the tears well up in her eyes, and her lips tremble. I saw then that she was a true-hearted maid, and believed that her father thought he was acting honourably in trying to save England from the Spaniards. And this made me feel as though we were not strangers.

"Mistress Faith," I went on, "will you, if evil befalls me, tell my father and my sister Celia, that I did not disgrace them?"

"Your sister Celia?" she queried.

"Yes. She is nearly of your own age," I said. "If you get to the other side of London and reach the town of Barnet, any one will tell you of the residence of Richard Hamstead."

"Then I cannot prevail on you to accept your liberty and your life?" she said.

"Not at the cost of being a traitor," I said, and my heart became like lead as I saw her turn to the door. "But, Mistress Faith," I went on, "where is your father now?"

"He is not here," she said, "he is away, as nearly all the men are. I expect him back in a few hours, and then——" her voice choked with a sob.

She went to the door of my gaol and knocked, whereupon it quickly opened, and at the same moment the thought of striking for my liberty was born in my brain.

Without hesitating a second I crept behind her, and so, as she left the cell, I followed, and as luck would have it, only one man, who looked like a servant, stood as guard.

Mistress Faith gave a scream as she saw what had been done, while the man rushed to attack me; without waiting a second, therefore, I struck him a heavy blow, which he, being unable to parry, took in his right jaw not far from the ear. He fell heavily to the ground, and I, the hunger for liberty being strong upon me, rushed up the stairway which was unguarded. Reaching the top I knew my whereabouts, so I made straight for a side door which I wot of, and which led into the garden.

I realized then that I was unprepared for flight, having neither sword, cap, nor cloak. These had been taken from me, and were, I supposed, in the chamber which had been

allotted to me. I dared not go thither, so seeing a sword hanging against the wall, I took it without question, also a hunter's cap, which, although not fitted for a Court dandy, suited my purpose admirably. I knew that I was courting danger by giving even a minute to this, but my head was sufficiently cool to know that I should be less likely to attract notice if I wore a cap, while one man possessing a sword was worth half-a-dozen having none.

I had barely got the sword fastened when I heard steps behind me, so rushed straight for the door. No sooner had I opened it, than a man stood before me, demanding who I was. I should well have liked to have answered him, but I reflected that the servant who had admitted Mistress Faith into my cell would be close behind me, and that if I waited I should find myself between two fires. Without speaking a word, therefore, I struck out blindly, and before the man could return the blow, I was rushing around the garden, seeking for some low place in the wall whereby I might be able to escape.

By this time the house was aroused. I heard the sound of voices, and of trampling feet ; but the moon had not yet risen, and the night was well-nigh starless.

Dangerous as was my position, I almost enjoyed it. I was free once again, my blood ran warm, and I had a sword by my side. Whether it was a good blade or not I did not know, but I had to take my chance of that. I crept around the garden, panting like a chased hare, but for ever on the watch for a place in the wall, low enough for me to mount. Although I looked carefully, the half-darkness revealed no place of escape, until I made up my mind that I must fight the serving-men who chased me. They gave me but little dismay. I judged that they were but poor fighters, or they would not have allowed me to escape so easily. In truth, I called to my recollection that Mistress Faith had told me how nearly all her father's retainers were away with him.

So I stopped and listened. I still heard the sound of voices, but as far as I could judge, no one was near me. This fact gave me breathing space, and then at the same moment I saw a ladder lying against the garden wall, which

had evidently been in use by one of the gardeners.

I could not help laughing, for truly, chance seemed playing into my hands. The garden wall seemed about twelve feet high, so, although the ladder was short, it enabled me to put my hands on the coping-stones in a moment. Not knowing what might be on the other side, and knowing that a sprained ankle or aught of that sort would be a sore calamity, I dragged the ladder after me, and letting it slip on to the meadow, I was about to use it as a means of descent when I heard a woman's voice.

I was hidden by a great tree, so I waited a second and listened.

"Oh, what will my father say?" It was Mistress Faith who spoke; evidently she was sore wrought upon, and the thought of giving her pain gave me sorrow. I dare say I was a fool; but young blood must be forgiven. Besides, I had an impression that the maid wished me well, and so I blurted out——

"If it be possible, I will hold my tongue about your father, Mistress Faith," I said.

"Master Hamstead, oh, Master Hamstead, you have undone me," she said like one in agony.

I saw what she meant, or at least I thought I did. She would have to give an account to her father of her interview with me, and, perchance, Tremayne and the rest of them would hold her as being guilty of giving me my liberty. Moreover, the thought that I had taken advantage of her goodness of heart pleased me but little, and then, like the hot-headed fool I was, I said—

"Mistress Faith, if I do you harm by escaping, I will go back to my prison.

No sooner had I spoken than I heard the sound of footsteps and of men's voices in the near distance.

"He is over here," one said, "quick, lads, and we shall get him."

"Aye", said another with an oath, "he shall suffer for the blow he gave me.

"No, no," whispered Mistress Faith, "go! quick go! No one will harm me. I trust you not to breathe a word against my father; but beware of John Tremayne,

and above all, beware of the Spaniard——Toledo."

At this I sprang to the ladder and was down the wall before any one could count ten. After this my way seemed easy. I sped across the meadow like a deer, and a few minutes later I was in a wood, where I was able to take breath and collect my thoughts.

For, in truth, I had much to think about. Try as I might I could not understand Mistress Faith's behaviour. She had scarce spoken to me before this night, and had, I thought, regarded me somewhat disdainfully. She had, in truth, while the house was full of men, kept much away from my sight ; but now, when the place was nearly empty and I lay imprisoned, she had of her own accord come to me as a well-wisher. She had really made my escape possible, too, and had at the last moment bid me go, when I would have gone back to imprisonment. Besides, what did she mean by bidding me beware of John Tremayne and Senor Toledo ? What did she know of the Spaniard ?

I racked my head sorely while I was in the wood, but not for long. I heard the sound of voices drawing nearer, moreover I knew by the blowing of a huntsman's horn that alarm was being given. So I made my way, as I thought, towards the town of Brentwood, from which I hoped I should find means of quickly getting to London town.

I kept to the fields for a good while, but reflecting presently that I should be better by getting on to the main road, I made my way thither ; but this led, as you will see, to my undoing, for I had not long reached the London road when two men rushed upon me so suddenly that I had scarce time to draw and defend myself.

CHAPTER IX

HOW I WAS ATTACKED ON THE HIGHWAY, AND AFTERWARDS SENT TO A LONELY HOUSE

THESE two men pressed me sorely, but I determined to sell my liberty as dearly as possible. I imagined that they were servants or friends of Master Godfrey Bedford,

and that they had come to take me back to my prison. So instead of yielding an inch I made a rush at them, and struck out with all my strength. They were smaller men than I, both of them, and for a moment yielded to me, and I, taking advantage, drew the sword I had taken from the passage in Barcroft Hall and placed myself in a position of defence.

The affair had been so sudden, and the night being yet dark, I had not been able to get a glimpse of their faces. As I said, I imagined that they had pursued me from Barcroft Hall. But when I had drawn my sword, I felt more master of the situation, so much so, that I was able to consider my whereabouts. It struck me that these men seemed to be coming from Brentwood, and not from Master Bedford's house; thus if my surmise were correct, they might know nothing about me.

"Who are you? what want you?" I asked.

By this time I saw that they were creeping towards me again.

"Your money, master," they said, "your money, master, and your money we mean to have."

Had I been wise, I should have given them the few angels which I possessed, but I reflected that I might need my wealth, and that these were but two clumsy rogues who hung around in the hope of waylaying farmers and other country people who might carry booty worth the taking.

"You may have my money if you can get it," I said savagely, for my blood was hot, and although they were two to one, I had but little fear of the encounter.

But I had mistaken my men; they used their swords with some amount of skill, so that although I was a far better fencer than either of them, it took me all the time to keep them at bay. Indeed, I feel pretty sure they would have killed me had not the moon, which had risen, and shone out between the clouds, given me enough light to enable me to parry the blows which they aimed at me.

"Come, master," said one at length, "we wish you no harm, but your money we mean to have, even if it be but a silver groat."

But I was so angry with them, that I recked not the

danger of dallying on the road, and I fought on, hoping to get the better of them. In this, however, I was disappointed. They knew how to save their skin right well ; indeed, I was beginning to feel wearied when I heard the gallop of horses. I thought that this might have frightened my assailants, but they took no heed, and pressed me so sorely that I was put to my wits end how to keep them off.

I was tempted to call for help ; but my pride kept me from doing this. I was impatient that I, Richard Hamstead, taught how to use a sword by my father, who was in his day a master at the craft, should be kept at bay by two country yokels. So I fought grimly on, and had, as I thought, slightly wounded one of the men, when a horseman came up.

I heard him give an exclamation, but I could not understand the words he uttered, then I felt a heavy blow on my head from behind. I did not fall, but I was sore stunned, indeed, so much did my ears ring and my head swim, that I struck out blindly. I heard the sound of voices in the distance, and wondered what it all meant, then a thousand sparks flashed before my eyes, and I felt myself falling.

" Coward," I shrieked, " coward, to strike a man from behind ; " and as I fell I saw a strange face near mine, and yet not so strange but that I seemed to know it. After that I heard a confused sound of voices, some of which I thought were angry, while others were jubilant, I felt as though I were floating through the air, while hosts of shadowy beings accompanied me. and then all became dark.

When I woke to consciousness, I felt as though much time had passed since the opening of the experiences I have just related. I could not tell why, but I was sure that they lay in the distant past. That, I remember, was my first impression ; my second was a feeling that I was very weak, and that I did not much heed what became of me. After that a drowsy feeling came over me, and I fell asleep.

When I awoke, I felt stronger. My brain was clearer, and I was able to take note of my surroundings. Everything was very quiet ; indeed, no sound came to me but the

chirping of birds. The room in which I lay was not large, but I noted that everything was clean and comfortable. The window which was near my bed was small, and the great lumps in the glass kept me from seeing the world outside. Still, there was plenty of light in the room, and the air seemed cool and sweet. I noted the bed. The posts I saw were large and quaintly carved, and the hangings, although faded, were rich in quality.

"This is no poor man's house," I reflected, "I wonder where I am?"

I saw that the door of the room was closed, and although I listened intently, I heard no noise of human footsteps, no sound of human voices.

My head throbbed violently, and on putting my hand to it, I felt it was bandaged. No doubt the blow I had received had broken my skull. Perhaps I had been near death. Still, I felt no fear, for I was sure that kind hands had cared for me.

I lay and listened for a long time. My senses were perfectly awake, and yet a delicious languor possessed me. As I listened I heard what I felt sure was the sound of the sea. The thud of the waves as they broke upon the shore could not be mistaken. At this I wondered the more where I was.

There was the sound of footsteps at last. The door opened, and an old woman entered. She looked like a trusted serving-dame, and when I noted her kindly face, I spoke freely.

"I am well cared for, good dame," I said, "and I thank you."

"Thank the saints for preserving you, young sir," she made answer.

"That I do, with all my heart," I answered; "but where am I, and who brought me here?"

"Time enough for you to know, when you grow wise, and when you grow better, young master."

"And when may I leave here, good dame?"

"When your head is healed, and you are strong enough to take a journey. It is early to talk of going, yet, for you have been very many days near the very gates of death."

And this was about all she would say to me, although I pressed her hard with questions. After a little time, an old man, who I discovered was her husband, came to me, but he was nearly as silent as the woman. All I learnt was that the house in which I lay was the house of their master, and that no one dwelt therein but they themselves. They would not tell me even how long I had been under their care, nor in what part of the country the house was situate.

After this a long time passed away without aught happening, and all I could make note of was that the days were short, so I judged we were still in winter. My strength came back but slowly, although many tasty dishes were brought to me. No doctor came near me, although I gathered from words the old man and woman let fall, that one had visited me when I lay near the gates of death.

Presently I was strong enough to get up and walk about, but when I spoke of leaving, they gave no answer save to shake their heads, as though they were talking of what was impossible. And, in truth, I believe that they were wise, for my weak days were long drawn out, and my strength seemed shy of returning. In one thing, however, they were kind to me. They allowed me to leave the chamber in which I had lain for so long a time, and led me into a long, low-ceiled room, which somewhat reminded me of the dining-hall at Barcroft Hall. Here I was able to walk about, and as chance would have it, here too I found some books which enabled me to while away the time. This helped me much, for as the weeks passed away, I grew weary of my imprisonment, kindly as I was treated. And yet, I reflected, I could not leave the place, even although the doors were opened wide, for my head had a knack of becoming dizzy, and my sinews were soft as those of a child.

The old woman dressed my head daily, for the wound was slow in healing, and this, without doubt, caused my return to health to be but tardy. By and by, however, I grew so strong, that I made plans for getting away, and although I made no pretence of strength, I rejoiced that I would soon be at liberty, and thus be able to return home

and assure my father and Celia, concerning whom I thought often, of my welfare.

Before I dared carry my plans into execution, however, I noticed that something was happening which made the faces of the old man and woman (whose names even I could not find out) very anxious. I asked them for news, but they continued to be as silent as the Sphinx, which travellers tell us lies on the edge of a great desert in Egypt. One day, while looking out of the window of the long, low room where I had found the books, I espied a horseman come to the house. He had evidently ridden far and fast, for both he and his steed were covered with mud, and both seemed much jaded. He rose into the court-yard like one well acquainted with the spot, and a few minutes later I heard the sound of excited voices in an apartment which I had never been allowed to enter.

"What meaneth this?" I wondered. "If I mistake not he beareth news of grave purport." And I chafed at my long inactivity, just as a hunter chafes in the stable when he heareth the cry of the fox-hounds.

I racked my brains much in wondering what his news might portend, when, to my delight, he entered the room where I waited, while close at his heels came the old people who had nursed me during my long illness.

"Give you good day, Master Richard Hamstead," he said.

"For that, thanks," I replied, "but you could make your words good, if you could tell me why I am here, and where I am, and when I can be at liberty."

"All that I can, and will, tell you, Master Hamstead," he made answer. "You are here to be nursed to health. You were well-nigh killed by two highwaymen after you had escaped from Barcroft Hall. You had not long given the old servants there the slip, when Master Godfrey Bedford returned, and without ado several were sent after you. They came to you just in time to keep the highwaymen from giving the blow which would without doubt have done for you. You were then taken here, so that you might be nursed back to health, and kept from doing harm to others."

He spoke in a free frank way, and there was a bright light in his eyes as though his disposition were sunny, and his heart kind.

"But the robbers struck me no blow," I made answer, "not one scratch did they give me."

"Then who——" and he pointed to my head, which was bandaged even yet.

"Some one from behind," I answered.

"From behind?"

"Of that I am sure. While I was keeping two men, who pretended to be highway robbers, at bay, I heard the sound of horses' hoofs. One man came up alone, and struck me from behind. He stunned me somewhat, but I still retained the use of my senses; then I heard the sound of other horsemen, but before they reached me, I received another blow."

"You are sure of this?"

"That I am."

I saw a strange light flash in his eyes, but he said nothing, save to express his sorrow that a cowardly blow should have been struck.

"How long ago did this happen?" I asked.

"God knows," he replied, with a shake of the head. "I have kept but little account of time," and he lapsed into silence.

"You look like one who hath received bad news," I said. I longed to ask him more questions, but he looked so woe-begone that I had not the heart.

"Bad news!" he cried, "nay man, I am the bearer of bad news. I——it's no use hiding it now——I fought by Wyatt's side, I and Bedford, and Tremayne and Throgmorton, and the rest of them, and——and——we are scattered. We began well, but Wyatt bungled things when he got to London; he became separated from his army, and hath been taken prisoner."

"Ah!" I cried.

"Ah yes, you rejoice; but, by heaven, it is an evil day for England. Gardiner is jubilant and hath already begun to make plans for the burning of heretics; the Star Chamber, and all the other relics of the bad old days, are to be revived.

Queen Mary is mad to marry the Spanish cub, and hath, so it is said, written to the Pope, promising to restore England to his fold. Cardinal Pole is to be recalled to England, and honest men everywhere are beginning to leave the country."

"Master Bedford," I cried out, 'and Mistress Faith; what of them?"

"Bedford hath gone to France; Gardiner's cubs were at his heels, so he had to fly fast. As for Mistress Bedford and Mistress Faith, God only knows what will become of them."

"But could not you go to her?" I asked.

"I go! Barcroft Hall is watched night and day, while I, if I put my foot near there, shall be as surely gibbeted as rooks go to their nests at night. Even now I am in danger of my life, and so this very night I must sail for France."

"For France! Can you?"

"Yes, we are but a mile or two from the village of Southend, and thither, after dark, I must speed with all haste."

"But a mile or two from Southend?" I cried.

"Yes——ah! I forgot; you did not know where you were. This place belongs to Master Bedford, and he had you sent here, because he could not think of another where you would be safe and well cared for."

"And is Master Bedford safe?" I asked.

"God knows. I trust so. As for Mistress Bedford, and her daughter, I fear the worst. The property of all rebels will be confiscated, or Mistress Faith will be made to marry some creature of Gardiner's. It may be it will be worse still. They are both Protestants, and Gardiner will have no mercy. He longs for power to light the faggots, and the power will come; my God, it will come, Master Hamstead!"

"But I ought not to speak after this manner," he said presently, "you are one of the Chancellor's tools, and you will rejoice in all this."

"No," I said, almost involuntarily.

"No?" he queried, "you have a face which suggests kindness; but then you are a Papist?"

"I hold to the old faith; but I love not burnings, and the Inquisition," I said.

"Anyhow, I come at Master Bedford's behest; just as he left me, he bade me come and give you your liberty. But for him you would have been dead long ere this. It is not many men who would have taken so much trouble to save an enemy, as he hath taken to save you."

"Mayhap I shall some day be able to return his kindness," I said, "and yours too," I added, as I looked into the young fellow's eager, but anxious face, "I shall be right glad if I can."

"There can be no help while Mary lives," he said sadly, "but I thank you. God never intended you for a spy, Master Hamstead."

"I have never been one," I said angrily.

"So Master Bedford said while others clamoured for your blood. But if you feel grateful to him, well then, try and help his wife and daughter, for God's truth, they will need it!"

I essayed no reply, but I made a vow in my heart to give them what help should lie in my power.

"In any case, I shall remember your kindness today," I said, "and I should be glad to know your name."

"In better times we might have been friends, Master Hamstead," was his reply. "I am Tom Killigrew, of Falmouth, Cornwall. It is not an unknown name."

I grasped his hand warmly, for although he was a rebel, he had an honest face, and he had been kind to me.

That night Killigrew set sail for France, while I, still weak and unfit for journeying, prepared to find my way back to London town, in order to see Stephen Gardiner, and render an account of myself.

CHAPTER X

OF MY JOURNEY TO LONDON, AND OF THE SIGHTS I SAW THERE

THERE is no need for me to speak at length of my journey to London, for naught happened on the way. I was long in getting there, for John Pearce and his wife

Mary (for so the people who had nursed me said they were called) were able to give me only a slow-footed hack. Besides, I was too weak to travel fast; in truth, I once thought I should have to rest a few days at a wayside inn, so feeble was I, and so dizzy my head. A night's rest set me up, however, and by the time I got near London, I began to feel my own man again.

When I got to Bishopsgate I saw that the town was in turmoil, men everywhere wore a frightened look, and all conversed in a low, fearful way, as though a dire calamity had taken place. A little later, when I reached St. Paul's Churchyard I saw a number of bodies dangling from gibbets, while a crowd of people stood, some gazing fearfully, others joyously, at the ghastly sight.

"What meaneth this, my masters?" I asked of two men who seemed disposed to talk.

"From whence have you come that you do not know?" they made answer.

"From as far as the Essex sea," I replied. "I have been lying there with a wounded head, given me, so I have been told, by highwaymen."

"Aye, faith, but you look pale," was the answer. "The men, young master, be Wyatt's rebels. There be more than a hundred hanging all over the city. Some on London Bridge, some in Fleet Street, some at Southwark, some at Westminster, and by the holy saints, the sight attracts people as carrion attracts crows."

"And the rebels are crushed?" I asked.

"That they be. Some few may have escaped, but many have been taken. Wyatt is lying in the blackest dungeon in the Tower, while Brett, one of the ringleaders, hath been sent with a host of others to Rochester and Maidstone. The queen's blood is up, I tell you, and hanging is the order of the day."

"Aye, hanging and head chopping," rejoined the other. "Yesterday Lady Jane Grey was beheaded, as was also young Dudley, whom she married. Every man who hath ever breathed treachery shivers in his shoes.

"I thought at one time the rebels would have had the best of it," said the other. "For faith, not a man moved

at the queen's name. But mark ye, a woman's voice hath power! I stood at St. Paul's Cross when she came with the Chancellor and the rest of them, while the people hung around like sullen dogs. She is not a woman of commanding presence, although she is queen,——the young Princess Elizabeth hath the better of her there; but she hath an eye that flashes like fire, and verily, when she stood and faced the crowd, we felt that a change was taking place. Nearly all the nobles had been weak-kneed, and faith, I wot not what was coming to the country, but when she spoke she made us cold, even to the marrow-bones. Have you ever seen her, or heard her speak, young master?"

"I once saw her at a distance in King Edward's time," I replied; "but I never heard her speak."

"Nay, then, you have missed something. She hath a voice like a man, and it rang across the square like a trumpet blast."

"Spoke she to the crowd herelf?" I asked.

"Aye, that she did, and her every word made ten traitors loyal. She told us that she was our lawful queen, ordained by God Himself, and that if she were dethroned, she, who might take her place, would be a usurper, placed there by traitors. As to the Spanish marriage, she declared that if it were not according to the will of her people, she would give up her own desires and submit the matter to her wisest councillors. I tell you, she melted all our hearts before one could count five hundred, and in twenty-four hours, more than twenty thousand men were ready to take up arms for her."

"I would I had been here," I said.

"I would not have missed it for twenty golden angels," replied the man, "even the great Henry could not have moved the people so. But she is paying off old debts now. London is ghastly with the swinging bodies of dead men, and everywhere men be trembling lest Gardiner should pounce upon them, and remember some word that they spoke in haste."

After this I made my way towards Ludgate, where Wyatt was met on his return from Kingston with a bedraggled army, and where the warder refused him admission. Here,

too, I saw more bodies dangling ; in truth, at almost every cross-ways I came to, the same sight met me, until I was sore sick at the sight of dead men. Verily, when at length I reached Charing Cross, I shuddered at the sight I saw ; and so ghastly was it, that I will not try to write it down.

I suppose I must have looked pale and ill, for a man of solemn countenance asked me what ailed me, and when my eyes turned towards the gibbets, he said solemnly—

"It is a day of hell, young master. The word of God is become of none effect, and the faithful are made food for the fowls of the air."

"Faithful ?" I said, like one in wonder.

"Aye, faithful !" he made answer, "these were soldiers of the Lord, and they only fought against Anti-Christ. But the end is not yet."

"What mean you ?" I asked.

"The Scarlet Woman is on the throne, and her hungry maw will not be satisfied until she is drunk with the blood of the saints. England will wade in blood, young master, the minions of Spain will overrun the land, and the cry of the oppressed will go up to heaven, as did the cry of the children of Israel of old. All these were Protestants, and they die because they are Protestants. Oh, woe is England !"

The man had a kind face, but I stayed no longer with him. I saw he was but a hot-gospeller, and although I had not the heart to denounce him there and then, I liked not hearing Her Gracious Majesty abused by a witless man. In truth, my blood ran hot as he spoke, and I had it on my tongue to cry out for a man of authority, but when I saw the ghastly bodies dangling right and left, and smelt the air that was made foul by their presence, I hurried down Whitehall towards Westminster, where I had been told I should find the Queen's Chancellor.

For four whole days I tried to get a hearing of Stephen Gardiner, but his hands were too full to give attention to me. Report had it that he had affairs of great importance to transact with the queen and her councillors, and that he was seeking to have a law passed whereby power should be

given to the Church to enquire into every man's faith, and then to treat every heretic as he should be treated.

As I have said, I held by the whole faith, neither had I patience with those who could not believe all the Church had decreed, but I shuddered at the thought of rack and faggot, as, indeed, what young man doth not, whose heart is warm, and who loves not cold-blooded slaughter, but a fair and honest fight?

A little later I was summoned into the presence of him whom I most longed, and yet most dreaded to see. The man, although I had seen him only once, had impressed me greatly. His great stature, his piercing eyes, the commanding power of his presence, all fell upon me like a spell, and although in my heart I longed to resist him, I dared not.

As I entered the room, he gave me a searching glance, then he turned around on a man who had been busily writing, who went away without a word.

"You have been long in coming, Master Hamstead," were his first words.

"For four days I have been seeking a word with you, my lord Bishop," I made answer.

"Four days. But before that, Master Hamstead?"

I began to tell him my story but he checked me ere I had uttered many words.

"I know all that, I know all that passed at the house of Master Bedford. Nay, I am not so ill-served as that. You were a fool, Master Hamstead, but a brave fool, a loyal fool. I give you so much credit. I know they asked you to take their oath, and when you refused, you made company for the rats. 'Stay, though, how did you get out?"

"They left only one man to guard me," I said, "and Master Bedford had left the house well-nigh empty. So I knocked down the gaoler and escaped."

"But when you were attacked you had a sword."

The man's knowledge frightened me, and I wondered if he knew aught of Mistress Faith Bedford's visit, which I much desired to keep from him.

"Yes," I said. "I took it from a wall in a passage as I went through."

"Not such a fool after all," he muttered, "anyhow, not so helpless."

"But the robbers overcame you," he said aloud to me.

"No, a man came up on horseback alone, and struck me on the head from behind."

At this he asked me many questions, which led to my telling him of my experiences at the old house near the village of Southend. At this he listened carefully, and made many inquiries, as though what I told him were news, and especially was he interested in the words of young Killigrew. I think the turn my story had taken kept him from referring again to the manner of my escape from Barcroft Hall, and for this I was right thankful, as, although I had done nothing to be ashamed of, I dreaded his knowing aught of Mistress Faith's visit. Why I felt like this I know not, yet so it was, and therefore when his mind fastened upon the escape of men like Bedford and Killigrew I was much relieved.

"But we will bring them back, and they shall all suffer their just doom!" he cried. "Every man of them. They are enemies to God, and enemies to their queen, and the time will come when God will laugh at their calamities, and mock when their fear cometh," and his eyes burned so red that I felt my blood run cold.

"You have been of more service to me than you think," he continued presently; "and you can be of further use yet. There is a long reckoning to be paid, and you shall have your share in the work of the Lord. Do not fear, do not fear!"

He started walking up and down the room, and he looked as though he were communing with his own soul. I have seen many striking men in my time, but none who have ever impressed me as he did. Perhaps his purple cassock gave him a kind of dignity, or perhaps the authority which he possessed, first as the Bishop of Winchester, and second as the Queen's Chancellor, made his carriage more imposing; anyhow, in spite of the stain upon his birth, I believed then, as I believe now, that Stephen Gardiner was in his day the most remarkable-looking man in England.

"They shall go under, the whole brood of them," he

cried, as though he forgot my presence. "Saul was condemned because he spared the women and children, and God's judgement was just. The offspring of vermin breed more vermin; allow only two vipers to live, and soon your country will be overrun with them. No, they shall all suffer. The traitors, the heretics shall die, aye, and their wives and children, who are filled with the same poison, shall they live? God would not have it so. The Church shall be supreme, and every man, woman and child in the kingdom shall bow the knee to her,"

I believe he had forgotten me as he spoke. In any case, he would only regard me as a foolish boy whose presence was of no importance; but presently he turned to me again.

"You must remain in London," he said, "you must not even go to your home. You are in the service of the queen, and you must be in readiness to serve, and, believe me, opportunity will not be slow in coming. Meanwhile, here is money. Make your quarters at the inn we both wot of, and hold yourself in readiness for action. I may need you to-morrow, it may be not for a week, a month; but be ready."

He spread out his hands and gave me his blessing, and then dismissed me.

I went down a broad pair of stairs with my head all awhirl, still I managed to keep my senses. As I walked along the corridor I saw many groups of men standing around, laughing and talking.

They paid no heed to me, and none of them lowered their voices at my approach. All of them seemed aflame with the punishment of Wyatt's rebels, and they discussed eagerly who would be the next to suffer.

"Bedford is not caught yet," said one.

"But he will be," said another. "He was one of the leaders, and there will be a treaty with France whereby all rebels will be sent back."

"And meanwhile, his wife and daughter are to be taken and brought to the Tower," cried another.

"Bedford's wife and daughter, do you mean?"

"Aye, that I do. It is scarcely a secret, for a number of men will start to-day for Barcroft Hall, and by to-morrow

morn Mistress Bedford and the fair heretic Faith will be on their way here, and if I mistake not, all the Bedford lands will be confiscate to the Crown. It is said that the queen intends to make it an abbey."

"But the women have done naught?"

"No, but they have listened to hot-gospellers, and the Chancellor intends to keep them in England until Parliament hath given him power to treat heretics as they should be treated. Besides, they are doubtless traitors at heart."

When I got into Whitehall my knees seemed to be no stronger than a couple of reeds, and I was some minutes before I felt capable of thinking. Without knowing why, I went to Westminster and entered the Abbey. A dozen priests were there chanting prayers, but I paid them no heed, my mind was too full of Mistress Faith's perils. I had not been in the abbey five minutes before my mind was made up. I would forthwith go to Barcroft Hall, and warn Mistress Bedford and her daughter while there was yet time, and perchance save them from a terrible doom. Stephen Gardiner's command was still upon me, and those whom I sought to serve were enemies to the Church, but these things I heeded not, and so it came about that in less than an hour later, I was again riding towards Brentwood as fast as horse could carry me.

CHAPTER XI

MISTRESS FAITH BEDFORD IS IN DANGER OF BEING ARRESTED FOR TREASON AND HERESY

I HAD ridden five miles before I fairly understood my position, but when London was well behind me my head was cool enough to realize that I had undertaken a mission which must cost me my favour with the Chancellor, and would probably cost me my head. But this did not deter me a moment. Faithful as I was to the Church and queen, I stopped short at the death of innocent women.

And there was something else which I can no longer keep back; I realized that Faith Bedford was more to

me than aught else on earth, and that I would willingly give my life to save her from harm. This knowledge did not come to me until I heard of her danger, and from that moment it became the master passion of my life.

I had by this time estimated the stern strength of Stephen Gardiner; I knew, to, that he desired more than aught else on earth, to stamp out heresy. He would have no mercy upon those who were not of the old faith, and he would cover land and sea to fulfil his desires. To a degree I sympathized with him in this; for how, I reflected, could the country prosper if it was at enmity with the true religion, and how could bishops tolerate those who opposed the true faith? But when I thought of Faith Bedford, imprisoned, and perhaps condemned to be burned as she would surely be if Gardiner could obtain power from the Parliament, I grew sick at heart, and urged on my horse to his utmost speed.

Anxious as I was, and filled with many haunting fears, I wondered what had become of Phœbe, my mare, that I had been obliged to leave at Barcroft Hall. For the nag I rode was the one given me by the old man and woman who had nursed me during my illness, and was ill-fitted for fast travelling. Had I had Phœbe for my steed, I should have accomplished the journey in half the time, and should have been far less tired at the end. I had fairly well recovered from the effect of my wounds, the four days' rest which I had obtained in London having restored me wonderfully, but I had not got back my full strength, as I realized before the day was out.

I had no plan of action, neither had I any thought as to how I should be received at Barcroft Hall, but I hurried on as fast as my nag could carry me. By sunset I had passed through Brentwood, and a little later the walls of the old house were visible in the dim light.

As I drew near, I thought the place was entirely deserted, but presently I saw a twinkling light in one of the windows. I concluded from this that I had arrived before the emissaries of Stephen Gardiner, and thus might have some hope of success; but no sooner had this ray of comfort entered my heart, than I was overwhelmed by the difficulties

which faced me. These difficulties I need not relate, as they will be apparent to all who have taken an interest in the story of my experiences, even although, for lack of intimacy with the grey goose-quill, I may have told it badly.

I went up to the door and knocked boldly. For some time there was no answer, neither could I hear any movement within; but presently I heard cautious footsteps coming towards me.

"Who are you? what want you?" said a man from within, but he did not open the door.

"A friend I replied, "open the door."

"What is your name?"

"That you will quickly know. Open the door quickly or you will regret the delay."

No sooner had I said this than I heard a window open above my head. A little later I heard a whispering inside the hall again.

"There is only one man," I heard a voice say, and a moment later the bolts shot back, and I saw two old serving-men who started back on seeing me.

"Master Richard Hamstead," cried one, and he looked as though prepared to fight. I saw that he was the man who had accompanied Mistress Faith to the door of my cell when I lay imprisoned.

"I thought you were dead!" cried the other.

"Listen, John Beel," I said quietly. "I have come from London as fast as horse can carry me. I must see your mistress, and without delay."

"My mistress!" gasped the old man. "If you had been dead as we had thought, you might have seen her, that is if the likes of you be admitted to the place where she hath gone."

"What mean you?" I cried, my heart as heavy as lead.

"She is dead. She was buried only this afternoon. God rest her soul."

"Dead! Mistress Faith dead!" I cried aghast.

"No, not Mistress Faith! But you asked for my mistress."

My heart became lighter as he spoke, and yet my sorrow

for Mistress Faith was increased as I thought of what she must be suffering.

"Mistress Bedford is dead," I repeated slowly, like one dazed, as in truth I was. "Doth Master Bedford know aught of it?"

"How can he know aught of it?" asked John Beel. "We know not where he is, except that he hath escaped to France. So far, not a word from him hath reached us; and that, I think, hath done much to kill my mistress. And now you can go, Master Hampstead. We would not deal harshly with you, although you are our enemy; depart, and leave us to our sorrow."

"I cannot," I said, "I have grave news to tell; believe me, I am a friend. Let me see Mistress Faith at once."

"Mistress Faith can see no one," was the reply.

"Why is she ill in health?"

"Aye, that she is, and crushed with grief. She hath no one but us to care for her."

"Mistress Leah Varley?" I said questioningly.

"She hath left us."

"Mean you that Mistress Faith is here without friend?

"Aye, that she is. Folk be afraid to come near. Spies be everywhere around trying to find out the enemies of the queen, and no one will come nigh us for fear they shall be thought guilty of treason. Even at the funeral to-day, scarce a soul came near."

The old man spoke sadly, like one in deep sorrow, as doubtless he was.

"Look you, John Beel," I said, "you will be sorrowful to your dying day if you do not let me see Mistress Faith without delay. I come not as an enemy, but as a friend, I come to save your young mistress from dire calamity."

I suppose there was something in the tones of my voice which convinced the man, for I saw that he hesitated.

"At the least do this," I urged, "go and tell Mistress Faith that I have ridden hard from London this day in order to save her. Be quick, or even I may be too late now."

"I will tell her," he said at length. "You, Peter Crowle, stay with Master Hamstead until I come back."

I spoke not a word to Peter Crowle while John Beel was away. My mind was torn with distracting thoughts; and every minute I expected to hear the tramp of horses' hoofs coming towards the house. Thus it was that I looked eagerly for John Beel's return, for if the truth must be confessed, I longed, in addition to my desire to take Mistress Faith to a place of safety, to see her face, and hear her voice again. I had not long to wait (although it seemed long to me), for soon I saw John Beel coming hurriedly towards me.

"Mistress Faith will see you," he said; "follow me."

All mud-bespattered as I was, and unfit to be ushered into the presence of a gentlewoman, I hurried after him, and a few seconds later I beheld Mistress Faith Bedford again. She looked towards me as I entered, then as if unable to control herself, turned her face towards the fire. She was very pale, and although no tears came from her eyes I saw that her sorrow was none the less great. Nay, rather it seemed all the more intense because of her tearless eyes, and I wished even that the maid would cry, because tears would be much more natural that the hard stony look which overspread her features.

"Mistress Faith," I said, "believe me, I come as a friend;" but she paid no heed to my words, save that I thought she shivered like one afraid.

It goes to my heart even now as I think of it, for never surely was there a more dire picture of desolation than that of the young maid sitting there alone in her sorrow. She was worse than an orphan. Her mother had been buried that very day, while her father was an outlaw with a price set upon his head. All her friends had deserted her for fear that they should be thought to aid and abet the treason of her father. Perhaps there was reason for this; as the queen's commandment had been exceeding stern and comprehensive. A proclamation had gone forth that whosoever should give shelter, bread, or any other kind of help to those who had favoured the rebels, should themselves be regarded as guilty of treason and thus because she was the daughter of Godfrey Bedford, she had been deserted by all save a few old servants.

And even then she did not know the worst. The news that she was to be brought to London and cast into prison had not reached her, and I, although I had come to help her, was afraid to tell her.

"Mistress Faith," I said again, "I would not have troubled you, but that I believe you need a friend. I told you when last we saw each other that if ever I could befriend you I would."

At this I stopped, for I was afraid to say more.

She turned to me again with that same look of stony grief in her eyes.

"Nothing can matter," she said. "I am alone, my mother is dead, and my father—God only knoweth where he is. I would that I could die, and go to my mother."

"Nay, Mistress Faith," I made answer, "your life is but at the morning yet, and although the sky is cloudy your sun will yet shine. Such is my prayer. Besides, you would not like to die as your enemies would have you die."

"Enemies?" she repeated, "what enemies have I?"

"Children be visited with the sins of their fathers." I said," and because your father is in danger, you too are in danger. Even now the prisons of London are choked full of suspected people, while the streets are made ghastly with the bodies of gibbited traitors. And forgive me for being the bearer of evil news, but you are not free from danger."

"But I have done nothing," she cried.

"You are the child of your father," I said, "and it is believed that you favoured his plans."

She was silent at this, and turned her eyes towards the fire again with a look half of fear, and half of wonder.

"And besides this," I went on, "it is reported that both the queen and her Chancellor have determined to destroy all who do not conform to the Catholic faith."

"But who are you to tell me this?" she cried. "You are Stephen Gardiner's—servant."

"I am your friend," I said with fast-beating heart, "and I would not have come to you without good reason. Even now," and this I am afraid I uttered brutally, "the servants of the queen are on their way thither to take you to London.

It is not known in London that your mother is dead, and before many hours are passed, men will be here with a warrant to take you both to prison."

I saw the maid's eyes fill with terror, and at the sight I grasped my sword and vowed that they should never take her.

"That is why I came to you," I went on. "Have you a place of safety to which you can go? Have you friends who are unknown to the queen's spies?"

"No, no, I have no one."

"Think again," I said eagerly, "no one?"

"Oh, I am afraid," she said, "I am alone! I have no friends."

"Yes, you have, Mistress Faith," I said. "I will do all in my power to help you. If you know of a place where you can go, I will take you there."

She turned upon me sharply. "Doth Toledo the Spaniard know you have come hither?" she said.

"No," I answered, wondering much what she knew of him; "he knoweth nothing."

"I have one friend whom I think I can trust, and it may be that with her I could escape notice. An old serving-woman of ours who lives near St. Albans. But but——" and she looked around like one bewildered, "I know not how I can get there."

"Have you horses?" I asked.

"Yes, there be horses yet in the stable. Yours among the number," she added.

"That is well," I cried, "in two days we can be there aye, less."

"But," and she turned towards me sharply, "why should you help me? You were my father's enemy; you belong to the old faith, and can have naught but evil feeling towards those who have discarded its errors. How can I trust you?"

I drew closer to her.

"Mistress Faith," I said, "it is ill for me to boast, but I must speak the truth. I was never an enemy to your father, but would rather be his friend. You have no one on earth who sorrows more at your loss than I do, and

although I am a Catholic, I will do all in my power to save you from harm. God is my witness that I tell the truth."

She looked straight in my eyes again, and I think she saw the light of truth shining there; I would that she could have seen more, but that could not be.

"I believe you," she said, "but what—what can I do?"

"Start to-night," I cried, "take a roundabout road to St. Albans. We can keep north of London, and go by way of Hackney and Tottenham. It is not more than fifty miles; by to-morrow at noon we should be at the house of your old serving-woman."

Still she hesitated, as was natural she should. Perhaps she felt that I was advising flight from an imaginary danger, for it was not in the nature of things that a young and innocent maid should believe that the queen's servants should seek to do her harm.

But she did not hesitate long, for at that moment we both heard the trampling of hoofs.

"Is it they?" she cried.

"I know not," I made answer. "Listen!"

The sound of horses came nearer and nearer. Evidently those who came did not seem to think it necessary to take precautions, for I heard the sound of voices.

Mistress Faith rushed to the window and listened.

"It is his voice," she whispered. "O God, it is his voice!"

A minute later I heard a loud knocking at the door.

"Open in the queen's name," said a loud voice.

CHAPTER XII.

I TAKE MISTRESS FAITH FROM BARCROFT HALL

NO sooner did we hear the words of the man at the door than a change came over Mistress Faith Bedford's face. The look of numb, dumb sorrow was gone. The pain was still there, but a flash of life took the place of almost callous despair. Her eyes flashed, and her lips trembled with emotion.

"Listen!" I said, "let us be sure."

The men at the door knocked again, this time louder than before, while the demand for admittance was repeated.

"Who are you?" we heard John Beel say.

"Servants of the queen, bearing the queen's warrant for the arrest of Mistress Bedford and her daughter Mistress Faith Bedford. Open the door! It is at your peril that you refuse."

"Wait here," said Mistress Faith, "I will be back in a minute or two. John Beel will not admit them without parley."

With quick decided movements she left the room, while outside I could hear the men proclaiming aloud their right to enter, and uttering terrible threats if the door were not opened right quickly.

I had begun to have fears as to the outcome of the business, and was trying to form some plan of action in case these men should find me ere Mistress Faith returned, when she entered the room fully habited for riding.

"Follow me," she said in a whisper.

Without hesitation I obeyed, but as I stepped to her side I thought of the nag I had ridden.

"Will not the queen's men make inquiries about my horse?" I asked. "I left it at the door."

"They will not have seen it," she replied. "You need not fear."

By this time we had reached a door which looked like an ordinary panel placed against the wall. In truth, I could not tell why she stopped before it; but as it flew open, I saw that she had a plan in her mind. A second later we were descending some stone steps, and I saw that we were entering a subterranean passage. Without a word, Mistress Faith lit a candle, and led the way along the passage for some distance.

"This is a secret way to the stable?" I questioned.

She nodded her head.

"Will not your servants wonder what hath become of you?"

"I left something on the table by which John Beel will understand."

Energy, decision, characterized her every word and movement. All that seemed yielding or passive in her nature had gone. It was she, moreover, who was thinking to purpose, and not I.

Presently she stopped.

"This ladder leads through a trap-door," she said, pointing, "pass through it, and we shall be in the stables."

I rushed up the ladder, lifted the trap-door, and a minute later I was helping Mistress Faith to ascend. She showed no fear, and her excitement had apparently overcome her grief, for her eyes flashed, and but for the fact that I knew of her loneliness, her sorrow, and her dangerous position, I could have thought that she enjoyed the situation.

My Phœbe gave a low whinny as she saw me, for the faithful animal recognized me in a moment and as truly gave me a welcome as if she were a human being. I looked around the stable, and saw only four horses, and all of them save Phœbe were heavy beasts, not fit for a woman to ride.

"You must ride Phœbe," I said, throwing a saddle on her, "she will carry you easily. She is as swift-footed as a hare, too."

She made no protest, but waited in silence while I got our steeds ready.

"And now we must ride across country," I said; "to go out by the road would be but to ride into the arms of our enemies."

"Do not trouble," she answered, "I know of a road," and with that she led the way between two high walls until we reached a lane.

"This is a by-way to the London road," she said. "It is but a track, but our horses will make no noise. We have grass under our feet."

Although it was fairly dark, I saw where we were. During the time I had been at Barcroft Hall I had taken note of the country-side, and I now remembered where this green lane joined the queen's highway. I saw, too, how wise Mistress Faith had been in thinking of it. By following its course we were able to cut off a mile or two from our journey, and also escape the notice of Stephen Gardiner's minions.

Still, we were able to go but slowly. The road was far from good, and if we had tried to ride with any speed we should surely have lamed our horses. Moreover, we often stopped and listened. I knew that it would not be long ere our escape was discovered, and I wondered much whether my name had been mentioned to the queen's men.

Presently I knew by the sound of galloping horses that Mistress Faith's departure had become known; I knew, too, that the country-side would be scoured in order to find her. My plan, therefore, was to reach the highway without delay, and then to ride with all speed. I comforted myself that there would not be a large number of pursuers, and that these would naturally become scattered.

"John Beel is a man of sense?" I said to Mistress Faith presently.

"He may be trusted at all times. He hath the scent of a hound, and it is but seldom he maketh a mistake."

"Think you he will throw them off the scent then?" I asked.

"That will be hard to say. He will parley with them as long as possible, and then he will find his way to the room where I was sitting. He knoweth of the secret way and would doubtless bid me fly. When he sees my glove on the table, a brown buckskin glove for the left hand, he will know I have gone; but whither he will not be able to guess."

"Knoweth he of the old serving woman at St. Albans?" I asked.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Would he guess that you made your way thither?"

"Perchance he might, but it is not sure."

"We are near the high road," I said, "it lies on the other side of the copse. Hark, there are horses coming this way."

On hearing this I led the way into the copse until we were hid by the shadow of the trees. The night, I remember, was somewhat misty, scarcely a breath of wind stirred, and the only sound we could hear save the trampling of hoofs was the gurgle of a stream which had been swollen by heavy rains.

Fearful as to who the night-riders might be, we bade our horses be still and then waited quietly for them to pass. By listening keenly I noted that two horses approached us, and as a chance would have it, they stopped not twenty yards from us, in truth, so near were they that I could hear their voices plainly.

No sooner did they speak, however, than Mistress Faith gave a low frightened cry. Not loud enough to reach them, but still it made me fearful.

"Hush!" I whispered.

"It is his voice," she said, "it is his voice. We are undone!"

"Whose voice?" I asked.

"Toledo, the Spaniard's," she answered.

At this I spoke no further, because I was beginning to realize the nature of the man. Even then I reflected that I had seen him only that morning, and that he had bidden me not to go near Barcroft Hall again, if I valued my neck. I had had a vague suspicion of what this portended, and now I felt sure that Senor Toledo had met Mistress Faith Bedford, and that he had conceived a passion for her.

I had little time for thought, however, for I heard the sound of voices plainly, and so still was the night that every word was easy to be distinguished.

"It is plain that she hath escaped, and that some man hath accompanied her," said one.

"Yes, that is plain." It was Toledo who spoke.

"Not one of the servants I should fancy. Can you think who her companion may be?"

"I know not. I must get back to London right quickly, and see if my suspicions have aught to support them. It is also necessary that it shall be known in London what hath taken place."

"Which way have they gone, think you?"

"I should judge they will have gone to the sea in the hope of escaping to France. That is why I sent the other men to watch the southern roads. It is true that the ports are well guarded; but there is no knowing what friends these rebels may have."

"They will not try to escape London way, think you?"

"I think not, but there is no telling; that is why you must wait here quietly and watch while I ride to London as fast as I may. But, mark you, Springfield, the woman must be treated tenderly, whatever happens to the man; if any harm befalleth her, I will demand the blood of him who causeth it."

"There is but little chance of our finding them. I trow," said the other

"You must be all as blind as beetles if you do not have them by morning," said Toledo. "Every road is guarded, and watches are everywhere; both in the house and out."

"But the young maid is as cunning as the devil," said Springfield; "her mother is dead, and so she hath only herself to look after. Besides, if the man whom she hath with her be one of Wyatt's rebels, he is possibly the maid's lover, and thus they will struggle to the last for liberty."

"If the man be he whom I have suspicions," said Toledo, "he is a fool, one who is easily gulled as a foolish chicken is caught in a farmyard. And by the saints, if it is he, he shall pay dearly for this night's work."

The other mumbled something which I did not hear, whereupon Toledo went on—

"But stay you here, Springfield. If by chance they take the London road, you will thus meet them, and if needs be, kill the man and bring the maid to London."

"Easier said than done," said Springfield. "we should have been a bigger band."

"Cease, thou chicken-heart!" said Toledo. "I have heard thee boast that thou art not afraid of any sword in London town, and so—but have done with talking. Wait you here and watch, I will go with all speed to London; and faith, I love not the thought of what my Lord Bishop will say."

With that Toledo galloped towards London, while Springfield dismounted and waited in the road according to the commands which Toledo had given him.

It will be seen, therefore, that our position was far from safe. We were within a short distance of the man in the road; and we could not move either forward or backward, for the slightest noise would reach his ears. If

even our horses were to whinny he would be on us, and there was but little doubt that he would have means of communicating with his friends. As I said, the night was still, and therefore we could not speak to each other, for as surely as we did the sound would reach him.

It may ne contended that I should have gone out boldly and fought him; and this I thought of doing, but I reflected that he would call his friends, and if he were a good swordsman I might not be able to despatch him before help came. Moreover, I had not recovered my full strength, and I dared not place the maid in danger, for my desire to shield her grew stronger every minute.

We waited there I should think fifteen minutes, during which time our horses stood reasonably quiet; but I saw that this could not last nuch longer, and I was about to court danger by moving away, when the man himself played into our hands by shifting his position and moving, not towards Brentwood, but towards Barcroft Hall. He went very slowly, so I judged that he moved simply to keep himself warm, and to relieve himself of the vexation of standing still. No sooner, therefore, had he gone a little distance up the road, than I turned to Mistress Faith, who I saw was weeping.

"Do not fear, Mistress Faith," I said.

"It is not that," she answered, "but I feel so lonely."

Whereupon my heart went out to her more than ever. I saw that while the excitement of action was upon her, she was brave and defiant, but in a moment of inaction she yielded to the natural grief of her life.

"God help me," I said fervently, "I will stand by you as long as I have strength;" whereupon I led the horses quietly along the copse, every step increasing the distance between Springfield and ourselves. When we had got to the end of the little wood, I saw a low place in the hedge, and a minute later we were on the road.

"We will keep on the grass by the side of the road, for a little while," I said, "so that no sound may reach that man." And this we did until I judged that we should be out of hearing. After this I mounted again, and we rode more briskly.

"Mistress Faith," I said, "you seem to know and fear the man Toledo?"

"I do," she said. "He came to our house months ago, and——" then she stopped suddenly, like one afraid to speak further.

"Said he aught to frighten you?" I asked.

"He told me he loved me," said the maid. "He even pretended to side with my father in order to win my love."

"Came he as a spy?" I asked.

"Nay, I know not," she said. "For many weeks all sorts of people came to my father, for the country-side hath been filled with spies. He came, I think, as an ambassador from the Queen's Chancellor, making many fine promises. But I knew not what he meant. He is as deep as the sea, and as cruel. But he gave me honeyed words, and made fine promises."

"Listened you to him?" I asked jealously.

"My father bade me be courteous, because he hath power with the Chancellor; but I repelled his offers of love, whereupon he frightened me sorely."

"Frightened you!" I exclaimed with set teeth.

"He said he would never rest until he won me for his wife, and that he would move heaven and earth to get me, that if the lives of twenty men stood between me and him he would destroy them all, that if a man dared to lift his eyes to me, he would kill him, and that if I spoke fairly or kindly to any man, that man should die, All this in a terrible way. I was told that he is a most skilful swordsman, and that although he looks thin and weak, he has far more strength than other men. Oh! I am afraid to think of him, and I would a thousand times rather die than fall into his hands."

"You shall not fall into his hands!" I cried. "God helping me, I will take you to a place of safety. It seemeth to me that the refuge at the house of your old serving-woman is good. Liveth she in the town of St. Albans?"

"No, not in the town; but in a cottage a mile away."

"That is well. No one will ever think of looking for you there."

"My father's brother lives in Bedfordshire, but he hat-

eth us all, because my father is not of the old faith. Otherwise I would go there."

"But that should not hinder him from sheltering you," I cried; "blood is thicker than water, and although he be of a different faith, he would not allow harm to happen to his brother's child."

"I know not," she made answer, "but I am terribly afraid."

"Where lives your uncle?" I asked.

"He liveth at Great Elms, not far from the town of Dunstable," she answered, which name I stored up in my memory.

I was silent, and for the first time I became really impressed by the thought that I was helping a heretic to escape. I remembered, too, that I wondered how a maid so gentle and so pure could harbour false doctrines, and deny that ours was the only true Church. But heretic or no, I felt my whole heart go out to her, and in spite of our danger, I felt a great throbbing joy in my heart at the thought of being able to help her, and to take her to a place of safety.

"We can go faster now," I said at length. "We must escape the town of Brentwood, because perchance Toledo will have left messages there. After we have passed it we must join the main road again for a little while, and then strike northward, and so get to Hackney without going through London."

We had no difficulty in escaping Brentwood, and presently, when the moon which was on the wane began to rise, I rejoiced to think that danger was over, for I did not see how Toledo, who on his own word was going to ride to London as fast as horse could carry him, could at the same time send men along the Hackney road to stop us.

We had barely gone five miles beyond Brentwood, however, when my heart seemed to jump in my mouth, for when we reached a lonely piece of road, a man and horse came out suddenly from under some trees, and a voice bid me halt.

"Master Richard Hamstead," said the voice, which I

recognized as that of Toledo's, "I will relieve you of the charge of the lady."

In an instant I had drawn my sword.

"No you will not," I said grimly.

CHAPTER XIII

I CROSS SWORDS WITH SENOR TOLEDO

"PROVIDENCE was favouring me, even when I least thought it," said Toledo, without approaching nearer. "My horse cast a shoe, whereon I cursed my ill-luck, and declared that the saints were against me; but in this I was wrong. Being a farrier of more than ordinary skill, as every good cavalier should be, and having horse-shoes, hammer, and nails in my saddle bags, I have put a new shoe on my nag's foot. The time which this took enabled you to come so near that I heard the sound of your horses, so having a suspicion that it might be you, I waited until you came up. The saints were kind all the time, Master Hamstead, and now, I repeat, you must give me charge of the lady."

The man spoke so quietly and so coolly, that for the moment I was thrown off my guard.

"How did you know I had left London?" I said like a fool.

"It would advantage you little to know. Still, you have served me well, Master Hamstead, and I ween that I shall be a more pleasant companion to Mistress Faith Bedford than you have been."

I kept myself in readiness for action; but I tried at the same time to think out the situation. No house was near, and as it was near midnight, I judged that no man would molest us. I dared not risk clapping spurs to our horses and galloping way, for Toledo would ride near us, and follow us whither we went. He would also devise means to get us in his power. I realized, too, that I was in danger on every hand. The moment my actions were related to Stephen Gardiner I should be in danger of being

thrown into the deepest dungeon in Fleet prison, for I had disobeyed his commands, and was working against his purposes. As for Mistress Faith, I almost lost my senses at the thought of her being in the power of Toledo.

"Senor Ferdinand Toledo," I said presently, "go you your way, and I will go mine."

"You can go whither you will," he said mockingly, "my lord Bishop will deal with you in his own time, and in his own way. For me, I have no commands concerning you; but Mistress Faith goes with me. I have a warrant to take her to London town."

"Show it," I said for the sake of gaining time.

"To any loyal and responsible person, I will do this with pleasure," he made answer, "for such as you, Master Hamstead, I have no dealings save to give commands."

"It so happens, Senor Toledo," I said coolly, "that the lady elects to go with me, therefore it cannot be as you say."

"Ah! say you so, Master Hamstead?" said Toledo mockingly. "Well, it will hurt me much to take away the life of a promising boy such as you, and for this reason I have spent some time in trying to let sense into your thick head. But this doth not seem to suffice; dismount, Master Hamstead, and let us try conclusions. I could easily ere this have cut your horse's hamstrings, but I love good horseflesh. I could also have run you through the body without giving you warning. But then I am a Spaniard gentleman, and love not such ways. You are but a country clown, and have lately recovered from a nasty sword-cut, therefore I ask you to dismount, and then we can settle matters as cavaliers should."

"Willingly," I said, for I was in no humour to brook a challenge from the Spaniard, moreover, I knew that our only means of escape was by disabling him. "Willingly, Master Spaniard," I repeated, "and this time you shall not strike me on the head from behind as you did before."

I saw him give a start, and the suspicions which I had had for some time were thus confirmed.

"Master Hamstead," he said, "I am sorry you have spoken those words. I come of a family which never

brooked an insult. Therefore you must die. Guard!"

At this we fell to fighting, I on the defensive, the Spaniard attacking me sorely. Had any one told me that a man of his build could be such a strong swordsman, I should not have believed him, but in truth, the man's sinews seemed to be made of steel, and if he lacked aught in strength, he made it up in his extraordinary swiftness of movement. Still, I had not learnt sword-craft for nothing, and as the moon had now risen higher in the sky, I had light enough to see his designs. We fought, therefore with equal fortune for three minutes, but I saw by the savage gleam of his eyes that he meant to kill me.

"Mistress Faith," I said to the maid, who, pale-faced and silent, listened and watched without a word, "do not be afraid; if I fall, Phœbe will outrun this man's horse. Carry out the plans we have made."

This I said because I saw that Toledo was a skilful swordsman, and because I wanted to prepare her for the worst; but I kept my eyes upon him all the time so as not to give him a chance.

After a time I saw that in pure sword-craft Toledo was my master, and if I, who had been acting on the defensive all the time, should attempt to attack him, he would run me through the body with but little ado. I therefore thought of another plan which, though dangerous, I hoped would conclude the business. I therefore still continued to parry, and never to thrust, but all the time I appeared as though my wrist had become weak, and my guard to be failing.

This almost led to my undoing, for Mistress Faith, when she saw me seeming to yield, cried out in fear, and I could not assure her without giving Toledo an inkling of my plan. The Spaniard, however, smiled grimly, and pressed me more closely. I saw him preparing for a lunge, the which I expected, so when at length he made it I parried his thrust, so that his sword just escaped my body, but brought him so near to me that I was enabled to grip his body. This I did, and so quickly, that I pinioned his arms in a moment of time, by the simple method of dropping my sword and throwing my arms around him.

As I said, it was a dangerous experiment, neither would I have adopted it had not my father, who had spent some time in Cornwall, at the house of Master John Carew, and had learnt the art of wrestling, taught me the trick. Even when I had succeeded in gripping him I was in sore doubts about the result, for I was not sure of my strength, which I had but partly regained. As Mistress Faith had said, Toledo, although thin of arm and narrow of chest, was strong beyond the ordinary, but I had him at advantage and I held him to me with a strong grip. And here my father's lessons in wrestling, and the big bulk of my body served me well, for Toledo became but as a child to me when I put forth my strength. He still held his sword, and struggled like an eel to escape me; but I was dangerous. I knew that my life, and more than my life depended on my strength, and being mightily wrought up I hugged him until I crushed his thin body in my grasp.

But he was too proud to cry out for mercy, and this made his condition the worse, for I hugged him all the more, until he had not a breath in him, while in his struggling he dropped his sword in the road. Thereupon, still practising the Cornish trick which my father had taught me, I threw him with great force on the ground, which stunned him so that he lay like one dead.

"Master Hamstead, Master Hamstead, is all well?" It was Mistress Faith who spoke.

"Yes, all is well, Miss Faith," I panted; "reach me my sword."

At this she dismounted. "Oh, do not kill him," she cried, "be not guilty of murder!"

"Murder," I said grimly, as I kept my knee on his chest and my hand on his throat, "nay, not murder. He will be a constant danger to us if he is alive, and he would have killed me."

"Nay, do not kill him, do not let us have blood upon our heads. Oh, you must not, you must not!"

"He is your enemy," I said.

"Yes, but do not kill him. I could not sleep at nights if you did. I should be afraid to live."

I was in a great passion by this, for a man who is fighting

for his life cannot keep calm; all the same, I loved not the thought of thrusting a senseless man through the body, and the maid's wishes became law to me.

"Then search the saddle bags, and see if you can find some strong rope," I cried.

At this she went to work right quickly, and a minute later brought me some. With these I bound his hands behind his back, and all the time the Spaniard lay like one dead, even although all the time I knew he was only stunned.

I was just about to tie his feet when I heard the sound of galloping horses.

"Oh, let us go, we are pursued," cried Mistress Faith, "let us go."

I saw the wisdom of her words, and taking Toledo's sword, and throwing it into a field hard by, I sheathed my own and jumped on my horse's back. Meanwhile, Mistress Faith had mounted; and so we galloped away quickly.

Presently we came to a road which bore to the right, and would, I thought, lead to Hackney, when I hesitated. Doubtless our pursuers would hear the sound of our horses galloping, for, as I said, the night was still, and noises travelled easily. Probably, too, Toledo would have gained his senses by the time they came up, in which case they would follow us in the Hackney road, where we should have less chance of escape than by riding straight on to London, where we might escape them amidst the network of streets.

"Will it not be better to ride to London?" cried Mistress Faith, "perchance they will not think of searching for us there."

Her words strengthened my own thoughts, so without more ado, we kept straight for London town. For some time we galloped on in silence, then I cried halt, and no sooner had we stopped than we heard the ring of horses' hoofs in the frosty air.

"They are following us," I cried, "but we need not fear. There is not one horse in fifty that is a match for Phœbe, and this horse of yours is seemingly sound in wind and limb."

"It is one of my father's favourite horses," said Mis-

tress Faith, and then I saw her put her hand to her eyes as though to wipe the tears away.

A little later I saw that we were nearing London, and all the time I kept cudgelling my brains to think what we could best do. For I saw that it would be ill stopping right at the seat of Stephen Gardiner's power, and where spies abounded to waylay such as had been mixed up in the Wyatt business. I had come to the conclusion that it would be well to push right on to St. Albans, when a calamity befell us, which drove all my plans ro the wind. This was neither more nor less than that my horse became suddenly so lame, that it was with difficulty I could ride him. As may be imagined, this had not long happened before we heard the sound of our pursuers growing nearer and nearer.

"What shall we do?" cried the maid, aghast at our misfortune.

"There is but one thing," I cried; "it will lose time, but it seems our only chance."

Whereupon I changed the saddles as quick as might be and then, having mounted Phœbe, asked the maid to mount in front of me.

She hesitated a second, and then did as I bade her; she stretched out her hand, and by my help was quickly seated, whereupon we galloped again towards London. But this event had much disadvantaged us. I was by no means a featherweight, while Mistress Faith was a well-grown girl, so that, although Phœbe had had breathing space, she could not keep up to full speed. But worse than all this, I could not think of a plan worth acting upon. Behind us were several horsemen who had evidently got an inkling of how matters stood, and were in full chase, moreover, they drew nearer and nearer each minute. Then to make matters worse, we had no sooner come close to the Tower, than a watchman came up, and with much ado, stopped my horse. At this my heart went into my mouth, for I knew that if we were detained five whole minutes, we should be undone.

"Whither away, young master?" cried the watchman as he held my horse's head.

"Matters of State," I cried without thinking.

"State matters," quoth the watchman, "and a fine time o' night to attend to them. But what of the maid?"

The man's voice was thick, and I judged he had been drinking strong ale.

"The maid hath enemies, worthy watchman," I cried, "and it becomes an honest man to help such. A handsome and gallant man like you, must have done this sort of work often. So let us away, and here is something whereby you may be able to drink to our success."

At this I threw a golden angel on the ground close behind him, whereon the man, seeing it glitter, stooped to pick it up right quickly, and in so doing, let go Phœbe's head. As you may be sure, I made good my advantage, and the next minute I had left the watchman far behind.

In spite of our danger, I could not help laughing at our good luck; neither did I feel down-hearted. And this, I think, will be easily understood, for I was young, and dreaded not the future; besides, I was helping the maid who grew dearer to me each minute. I had not reached London Bridge, however, before I realized again the desperate plight we were in, for the inns were closed, and our pursuers might come upon us at any minute. I saw that Phœbe, especially with her double burden, could not hold out much longer, while I had it not in my heart to leave her, and make a rush for some of the dark side-streets. Even while I thought of this, I heard the sound of our pursuers, and at the same moment, I saw the towers at St. Paul's Cross rising high in the heavens.

"Have you a plan?" said Mistress Faith, "they will soon be upon us,"

At this I could not speak.

"Could we not dismount, and go into the church?" she said, "they will not think of seeking us there."

Although I did not think this a safe plan, it was a happy thought, as will be seen. No sooner had the words passed her lips than I bethought me of what the old monk who had spoken to me in the church, said to me. Each word that he spoke came back to my memory. "Richard Hamstead, you may need a friend, you may need a shelter in

the storm. If you do, do this, and you may do worse. Come to a little street called St. Paul's Hill. Stop at the third door, and knock three times."

"Ah, if I can only find it!" I thought, and just then we reached St. Paul's Cross.

"I have a plan," I said, and a second later we had dismounted. Seeing a dark alley, I led Phœbe through it, while Mistress Faith walked by my side. Not a single soul was astir, so we could ask no questions, but the light of the moon showed me where to go, and presently I saw a little street which ended in what I have been told the French people call a *cul de sac*.

"If they find us here we shall be caught like rats in a trap," I thought; all the same I was not without hope, for I thought the place accorded with the monk's description.

There were but five houses on each side of the little street, and seeing a dim light in the third house on the right-hand side, I knocked as he had directed. With marvellous quickness the door opened, and an aged woman met my gaze.

"What would you?" she asked.

"A cup of cold water, good mother," I made answer.

At this she hurried in right quickly, and a minute later the old monk appeared, fastening his robe with one hand, and rubbing his eyes with the other.

"Richard Hamstead, good father," I whispered. "A persecuted maid! We are pursued closely."

He seemed to understand at once, in spite of my meagre information.

"Come in quickly, my son." he said, "and—and the horse! Ah well, I can provide!"

Whereupon he pulled Mistress Faith and myself into the house, and immediately afterwards went towards Phœbe, who tossed her head and looked as though she would run away.

"Will the maid be safe within?" I asked.

"Aye, as safe as if she were in a convent."

At this I hesitated, for I had heard so many reports of nuns in convents, that I knew not what he meant.

"As safe as if the Blessed Virgin were by her side," he went on. "Come."

With that he left the maid within the house with the old dame for a companion, and then I took Phœbe by the head, and followed the monk through a low archway into a yard.

"This is not the first steed that hath been sheltered here," whispered he, and then he closed the door of the archway, after which he led the way into a linhay-roofed building where there was comfortable room for a nag. The floor of the place had a thick layer of straw, so that no noise could be made.

I pulled off Phœbe's head-gearing, and threw some hay before her, and was on the point of asking for water when I heard the sound of voices.

"Ah!" said the monk in a low whisper, "just in time."

"Listen!" I cried, and in the silence of the night every word reached us clearly.

"They have not gone down Ludgate Hill," I heard one say. "That I dare swear."

"They must," said another.

"They could not pass the gate, I tell you. It hath been guarded closely since Wyatt sought to force his way through. Besides, why hath the sound ceased?"

At this my heart beat fast, for it was Toledo who spoke.

"Is there an inn near?" asked another.

"Marry, I know not; but if there be, it would take time to arouse the innkeeper. We must have heard, too, for the night is windless. The noise of horses' hoofs ceased at St. Paul's Cross."

"Then they must be near. They cannot have ascended into heaven like the prophet of old."

"If they be, we must go after them," said Toledo.

"You would not find your way," some one said with a laugh. "You know the road to hell better."

"Can they have gone into the church?" I heard a voice say.

"Marry, a good thought, we will see."

"No, no! I like not the thought of going there at this hour. The ghosts of churchmen will be roaming

about, and the place hath been barely cleansed from the defamation of heretics."

"Ye are all fools," cried Toledo; "but what is this?"

"What?" asked the other.

"It is foam from a horse's mouth, and it is scarcely cold. Methinks they are not far away."

CHAPTER XIV

THE MONK'S HOUSE NEAR ST. PAUL'S CROSS

"FOAM from a horse's mouth, Master Spaniard," cried a voice in answer to Toledo, "ye be mad."

"Aye, but look, here it is plainly before your eyes. See, if ye be not blind."

"Blind!" cried the man, "methinks I can see what is to be seen, but no man swear to what doth exist."

"Then what is it?"

"What is it? Why, Master Spaniard, if ye were English instead of a wine-drinking man from another country, ye would know that this is but the froth from a mug of good ale. By the mass, I would I had a gallon now, for I be sore athirst."

"Aye, and while we be fooling here they have gone God only knows whither."

"I tell you, ye be blind as bats, they must be close at hand. Think you I know not horse's foam from your cursed ale froth."

"Blind yourself, and a fool to the bargain!" cried the Englishman angrily. "If they be near by, where be they? They were but five minutes ahead of us, so where be they gone? You have led us down this hole, where only a few work-people dwell and who have been asleep since sundown. Even though the man and maid have taken shelter, what of the horses? They cannot be put to bed like Christians, and there is neither sight or sign of hostelry."

On that Toledo shouted aloud, and knocked at the door of one of the houses.

"We be lost, Master Monk," I said.

"Nay, wait, methinks no."

A minute later I heard the sound of voices again.

"Have ye heard or seen aught of man or horse here since an hour from now?" I heard the Spaniard say.

"Man or horse! Marry, no. We've been all abed for many hours, as ye ought to be."

"Who be ye that live here?" asked Toledo.

"God save the queen; we be all faithful," was the answer. "If ye have aught to learn, go to the watchman who standeth by the church, and if he be sober, he will tell you all there is to know. I have to be up betimes in the morning, my masters, and must have my sleep. Good-morrow, my masters."

"Did I not tell you?" cried the man who most opposed Toledo. "By your fooling you have let them escape. They have gone up St. Paul's Cross, and along Aldersgate. Aye, and I'll warrant me they have got away in safety, for the watchman there, ever since the queen's coronation, hath been drunk every night. He drinketh, he saith, to the queen's happiness, as every good Papist should."

"I tell you, they be here. I can smell horse's breath."

"Well, you Spaniards may have a nose for such things; but this will not count with my Lord Bishop. If we lose them, he shall know what a fool you are, Master Spaniard."

"I have lost my sword or I would slit your throat," cried Toledo savagely.

"Slit my throat, eh? Lost your sword, eh? Ha! ha! God save you, but we found you half dead, thrown on the road, and pinioned by a boy. A boy, Master Spaniard! and if a boy could treat you so, how would you fare in a man's hands? Stay here and watch, Master Spaniard; as for me, I go to find them!"

With that we heard steps up the street, but whether the Spaniard left them or no I wot not.

"The maid will be sore frightened, Master Monk," I said, "can we not get to her? How shall we be sure that the man hath gone?"

"What matters?" said the monk, "come hither!"

With that he led the way down some steps until we came to a kind of cellar door, and then I saw that the back part of the house was much lower than the front. A little later we entered a room where Mistress Faith and the old woman sat together.

"*Pax vobiscum*," said the monk, "all is safe, my daughter. Be not afraid."

Mistress Faith looked at the monk and then at me, as though she would that I should confirm his words.

"I verily hope that we have escaped, Mistress Faith," I said. "They followed us hither, but now they have gone not knowing where we are."

"The Spaniard!" she said, "know you aught of him?"

"He came with the others."

"Ah! But you will save me from him, Master Hamstead?"

"If God be with me, I will," I cried. "So far we have been miraculously preserved, and we have set at naught all the devices of those who would do us harm."

I heard the maid say, "Thank God," and then it seemed as though her woman's nature, and her great grief overcame her again, for she fell to weeping, while I stood by her like a dumb fool, for I wot not what to say to cheer her. Whereupon the old woman soothed her with many comforting words, such as only women who are mothers can speak.

"Methinks," I said, "the maid is both tired and hungry. She hath great sorrow, too. But to-day her mother was buried, and we have ridden many miles to-night, and have been sorely wrought upon."

"Tell me naught," said the monk, "it will be better so, better so. But for food and rest, the sweet maid shall have both."

With that the old woman left us, but ere long appeared again with two steaming bowls of bread and milk, the which I ate with relish, although I was much grieved to see that Mistress Faith was slow at partaking food.

"Have you a bed whereon she can lie, Master Monk?" I asked. "For myself, I want nothing. I cannot sleep, and I would be ready in case of danger."

"You are sure you are not ill, Master Hamstead, you do not suffer?" Thus said Mistress Faith wistfully.

"Did I know you to be safe, I should be wholly content," I said; "even now I am happy, for I believe all is well. Sleep in peace, Mistress Faith, and while I have strength nothing shall harm you."

"I thank you, Master Hamstead, and I will pray God to bless you. When happier days come, my father will be able, perchance, to show our gratitude better."

And at this the old woman led her to a room adjoining, while the monk and I were left alone.

We sat long, neither speaking a word, for the monk had somehow chilled me. I saw that he desired not speech, and although I would fain know many things about him, my questions died on my lips.

I had no desire to sleep, although I had spent many hours of excitement, and even when a drowsy feeling began to creep over me, the sight of his face woke me up again and set me wondering.

In this way hours passed. The house was silent as death, and I heard no sound save the tolling of the bell at St. Paul's Cross, which somehow seemed to make the silence which followed all the greater.

As I sat, my determination became more and more strong to save Mistress Faith from harm at all hazards. Aye, and if those who read this had seen her, had they beheld the look of trustfulness and tenderness and purity in her eyes, had they realized the danger she was in, they would have felt that I was only striving to do what any man ought to do.

"Well, Master Richard Hamstead, be thy plans well laid?"

The monk's words broke so suddenly upon my ears, that I started and placed my hand upon my sword-hilt.

"Aye, that they be," I said unthinkingly; "but I dare not tell them to you."

"And why, Master Hamstead?"

"Because I know you not, Master Monk, and although you have been kind to me, you tell me nothing of your-

self. There is mystery all around you, and I love not mystery.

"Good for you, good for you,"

I looked at him keenly, not knowing what his words portended.

"I have asked you nothing," he said, "and I have told you nothing. I do not ask you to trust me; in truth I desire to know nothing. Perchance I know too much already. Some day you may know why. But surely you can believe that I wish you well. In truth I do. But do not tell me whither you go, that I would not know."

I continued to look at him, but I could not answer a word.

"This however, there is need to say. There is no safety in London. Spies abound, and ere this, although the sun hath not yet risen, Stephen Gardiner will have his hounds abroad. Every gate will be guarded, and every road watched. This maid whom you have brought, is a link in Gardiner's chain. Through her he means to get at her father. That is why she was to be brought to him. He did not know of her mother's death, and he felt sure that through the love of the women he could get at the man."

"Aye, that should be plain," I made answer.

"Therefore the roads will be beset with snares, and behind every bush will be a spy."

"Hath Gardiner a spite against Master Bedford?"

"Hush, mention not his name. Stephen Gardiner believes that he had much to do with his imprisonment in Edward's time, and he fears him. He would rather see the maid's father brought to the block than see even Wyatt there. He would rejoice more at his sufferings than even at Northumberland's. But enough of that, you must get out of London. It were well you could get out of England."

"But how, Master Monk? How can we, if spies so abound?"

"That must be considered. But take this advice, Master Hamstead, if once you take the maid out of London, watch for an opportunity to get across the seas. It can-

not be done for many weeks yet, for every boat, every port is watched closely, but the chance may come."

"But how, father?" I asked, "how can we get out of London town?"

He sat for a long time before he spoke.

"Know you Hadley woods?" he asked.

"I should, right well," I answered, "they be but a few miles from my home!"

"Know you the great tree just below Hadley Church?"

"Right well."

"When there you be but eight miles from St Albans?"

"But eight or ten."

"Well, to-morrow, when many people be about, you must walk out of London."

"But how can I if spies be everywhere?"

"You must go in monk's attire. Beneath, you may wear your own clothes, and the monk's gown will not give you too much warmth, for it is cold. In this way you will pass unnoticed. If men think of you, it will be only as a brother on his way to St. Albans Abbey. You will go to the great tree near Hadley Church alone."

"But my horse, good father?"

"Your horse must remain in London. She shall be taken good care of. I will not sell her."

"But Mistress Faith? I cannot leave her unprotected."

"You cannot protect her in London."

"But—but!" I stammered.

"You will go to the great tree, near Hadley Church. You will reach it at sundown. You will first go into the church and say your prayers, and then go away like one in meditation. Then you will get behind the tree and wait."

"Wait! For what?"

"You will wait for your heart's desire."

"But who will care for Mistress Faith?" I asked. "What will she think when she discovers that I have left her?"

"You must trust me," said the monk. "Hark! the bell is ringing again, and I must go to St. Paul's Cross."

CHAPTER XV

THE GREAT TREE ON HADLEY COMMON

THE next day I started by means of a passage from the back part of the monk's house. It was just past mid-day, I remember, and the sky was dark. I had seen Mistress Faith but once during the morning, and had spoken only a few words to her. She had assured me, however, that she had rested in peace, and had been treated with great kindness. I had no knowledge of any plans which the monk had conceived, save those I have related. I had no assurance of his good-will, save his apparent desire to serve me, and I had no knowledge whatever of the man himself. It was ten o'clock in the morning when I saw Mistress Faith, and it was, as I said, a little past mid-day when I started on my journey.

I felt very strange in my new attire. The monk's garb covered me from head to foot, so that my own garments were hidden. This advantaged me much; another thing for which I was thankful was that I was able, by means of a fair amount of ingenuity, to fasten my sword to my side in such a way that it could not be seen, neither did it hinder me from walking.

There were many people in Ludgate Hill, when at length I reached it; but no one regarded me. This eased my mind much, for I constantly feared that I might meet Toledo, or some other of Gardiner's minions. When I passed through the gateway, I saw that the bodies of Wyatt's followers were still hanging on the gibbets, and as the day was frosty, although foggy, their clothes were as stiff as the dead limbs which they covered. The sight looked more ghastly to me than when I had first seen them. Perhaps this was because I felt myself in danger of being treated even as they were. With a shudder I passed up Farringdon Street, casting a fearful glance at Fleet prison as I went, and a little later I was well on my way towards the parish of St. Pancras.

No man stopped me, or said aught to me. Some, I thought, gave me a pitying glance, while others scowled as though they hated the class of men to whom they thought I belonged. For at that time, although Queen Mary had brought back the old faith, and while most of the people professed that faith, they still gave scant love to priests. They believed that while they were necessary for people's salvation, they were enemies to liberty and happiness as far as this life was concerned.

I was glad, therefore, when I reached Highgate, and was thus away from London town. As I trudged along I could not help feeling that I had in no way fulfilled my father's hopes concerning me. When I left home I was apparelled in gay finery, and rode the best horse in the country-side, while now I trudged along in disguise. Then I had the Queen's Chancellor as my friend, now he was, I felt sure, my enemy. Then I had promises given me concerning a maid of high degree who was to become my wife. Now I cared naught for such. All my love was given to a hapless maid, who was the child of a traitor, and on whose head a price was set. And yet I was happy. Far happier than then. For let who will say aught to the contrary, the love of a boy's heart is more to him than place or position, and a smile from Mistress Faith made me happier than would the hand of the highest dame in the land. I knew nothing of what lay before me, I dared not think of what might be the end of my adventures, but my heart was light, and I found myself singing as I trudged along.

Presently Highgate was left behind, while later on I saw away to the left the village of Totteridge. After a time I passed an inn, and feeling somewhat hungry I turned in for a mug of ale and a bit of bread. The innkeeper eyed me closely, I thought, but he gave me my ale without a word, neither would he take the money I gave him in payment thereof.

"But I can well afford to pay," I said.

"Nay, rather give me your blessing," he said.

This, as you may well imagine, troubled me sorely, for I had never expected to have to do aught of the sort.

I remembered Father Bennet's form of benediction, however, and gave it, I am afraid, clumsily. This made him look more closely at me, and a minute later he brought in a man who set my heart beating finely. For he was none other than a farmer who lived in the district of Barnet, and while not one of my father's tenants, might easily recognise me.

"Good morrow to ye, Master Monk," he said.

I spluttered out some reply, I know not what, and then the fellow laughed like one pleased. But he looked stupid, and his eyes were heavy, so I had no great fear.

"Whither go ye, Master Monk?" he asked.

"I am on the road to Dunstable," I made answer.

"Stop you at St. Albans Abbey for the night?"

"Mayhap," I replied. "I know not if I shall receive dispensation."

"Ah, but I will give you a lift as far as Barnet town, so please ye," he said, keeping his heavy eyes upon me.

"Nay, I dare not. It is laid upon me to walk." This I answered on the spur of the moment, for I sorely wanted to be rid of the fellow.

At this the farmer left the room, while I left the house hurriedly, but ill-pleased at my adventure. Perhaps, for one thing, the experience did good, for it determined me not to go through the town of Barnet. I reflected that I was nearing the neighbourhood where I was known, and so must not be seen. I therefore took a short cut across the fields towards Hadley Woods, and ere long saw the great tree which the monk had mentioned. According to his commands, I went into the church and said my prayers, thinking most of Mistress Faith as I did so, then I walked slowly down towards the woods again, wondering much, and fearing not a little.

Still I went to the great tree hoping for the best.

Nevertheless, I was a prey to many unpleasant thoughts as I stood by the great tree, whose branches were thick above my head. Although it was winter, it seemed to have much foliage, because a great mass of ivy had crept along its branches. These branches, too, were much tangled, thus it was—the ivy which covered them being

abundant——they looked in the fast-fading light much like a tree might look in summer. The trunk, moreover, was of great size, larger than any I had ever seen, and although report has it that in a forest in Nottingham there is a tree associated with Robin Hood, which is much greater, I at that time doubted it.

Here I waited—thinking, sometimes woefully, and sometimes hopefully, over all that had happened. My heart leapt at every sound, and I listened and watched with much care.

Presently, after much waiting, I saw, or thought I saw, two or three forms (it had now become so dark that I was not sure which), cross a piece of greensward and then enter the wood.

"It must be she," I thought, but on reflection I did not feel sure. In truth, so ignorant was I that I knew not what to expect, and I cursed myself for setting out on such a wild-goose business. After this I waited five minutes more, and then my impatience becoming too much for me, I crept nearer to the wood. I bent myself almost to a double in doing this, and as it was now almost dark, I persuaded myself that no one would detect me. When I had got to the very edge of the trees I listened, and a minute later I heard men's voices.

"A screech owl, you are sure?"

"Aye."

"Bulton is sure that it was Hamstead dressed like a monk."

"Aye."

"And one of the Spaniard's men said he had heard of two women dressed like pilgrims."

"That may mean nothing."

"Aye, but it doth. The Spaniard can see in the dark and his spies are like sleuthhounds."

"Pilgrims be plentiful since Queen Mary hath reigned."

After this I heard nothing more, though I listened carefully.

Minutes passed and nothing happened, then I heard a voice again.

"Weary waiting."

"Aye."

"I have a plan."

"Tell it."

"Let us get up to the tree and hide. If the false monk is there we take him. If the pilgrims come we take them. The Spaniard will be well pleased."

"You know what Lorimer said?"

"Aye, but he is a fool, and I am sure he is bungling it."

"Well, wait a bit first. We may spoil everything by being hasty. I mean to get my money this time."

Then silence followed, whereupon I crept back to the tree. I was by this time in sore straits, for I was slow to understand what had taken place. Of this I felt sure, the monk was faithful, but somehow his plans had been found out. Immediately I connected the two pilgrims with Mistress Faith. Perhaps the other was the old woman whom the monk called his mother. In some way I must have been watched too, how, I knew not, but, as the men had said, the Spaniard was cunning beyond measure. Besides, he professed to love Mistress Faith, and declared that he would wed her.

Then the danger of the situation appeared to me. If these men came up, what would become of me? Possibly they were both trained fighters. If I went away, and Mistress Faith came what would become of her?

I thought hard, but plans were tardy in coming. This was perhaps natural, for I was much in ignorance concerning my work.

After this, many minutes passed in utter silence. Neither voice nor sound could be heard. But for what I had overheard I should have thought the monk had duped me and that I had come on a fool's errand. But I was sure he was faithful, even although he thought it wise to say but little to me. Perchance the mystery surrounding his own life had somewhat to do with his silence.

Then all of a sudden my heart seemed to leap into my mouth, for I dimly saw three forms come out of the wood and creep towards me. Evidently they had become weary of waiting, and were coming to my hiding-place as they had said. In a second I caught a twig which grew

from the trunk of the great tree, and a minute later I had reached the fork from which the main branches grew. But no sooner had I done this than I saw how unsafe I was. The ivy was not so thick but that I could be discerned easily, and I knew that in this case I should be at their mercy.

I saw the men come nearer and nearer, and in the dim light they looked like three stalwart fighters. I looked around in the hope that I might hide behind one of the branches, when my foot slipped and hurt me sorely. But this proved to me my salvation, for it led me to discover a great hollow in the trunk of the tree which had been almost covered with ivy. A minute later I saw that this hollow was big enough to enable me to pass my body through, and in a few minutes I was hidden in the heart of the great elm.

I was now safe, for no one could see me from the ground, neither would any one think of climbing to me.

I heard the footsteps of the men draw nearer and nearer, and then cease close to me. For some time there was a silence, then I heard a whisper.

"There must be some mistake. The false monk is not here. He must have discovered our plans."

"That may not be. We know not where he was to wait, we only know that he was to meet them here."

After this there was a silence for some minutes, while I, cramped and aching much, remained silently in my hiding-place.

"This is a weary business."

The man who spoke was evidently in a bad temper, and well he might be, for the night had grown fearfully cold.

"Aye, there must be a hitch somewhere!"

"Hamstead should have been taken when there was a chance."

"Nay, then the maid would have been missed. He was allowed to be free for a while longer that the maid might come to him, and then they could be taken both together."

"How know you that the maid cometh to him?"

"The Spaniard found out. How, I know not, but he

hath spies everywhere. All I know is that the maid was to meet Hamstead here this night. Master Toledo was told that the maid would come disguised as a pilgrim in the company of another pilgrim."

"If he knew so much, then why could he not have taken her?"

"I know not; perchance they will come by a road that he wot not of. We must obey our orders. There be watchers in every direction, so that the moment they draw hither the owl will screech. Then our work will begin."

"I am sore mazed with the business, sore mazed. Why hath not Hamstead come hither?"

"I know not. Speak lowly, for if he heareth he will not come."

"There is but little danger. The wind wails sadly, and as there is an open space all around us we can watch, while here beneath the tree it is dark as doom. Why we can barely see each other."

"Aye, and the moon will not rise for three good hours yet. Aye, but the false monk will have a right warm reception when he comes hither."

"Aye, and the maid too."

"But it is fearful cold, fearful cold. I would that the Spaniard suffered it instead of we. While we are here doing work for which he will get all reward, he is drinking wine by a warm fireside."

"Aye, but he was unable to come. His thin body is so sore that he can hardly bear to move. That young bear must be mighty strong at hugging, for, by the mass, he nearly hugged him to death. He is a sore sight to-day, I tell you, although his mind is as clear as ever."

After this there was a long silence again, in which no one moved or spoke. How long it continued I know not, but it seemed a terrible length to me, for I grew more cramped and more cold. I dared not move for fear of making a noise, and thus one foot, which was in a cramped position, became dead, while in my right hand there seemed a hundred needles which pricked me without mercy.

Presently, however, I forgot all this, for I heard a cry which almost drove me out of my senses. It was the cry of a screech-owl, clear, sharp, and piercing.

"Ah!" I heard the men say, "they be coming, they be coming. There will soon be merry doings, my masters."

All sorts of terrible fears came into my heart, and yet I dared not move. By so doing I should make things from bad to worse.

A minute later I heard the sound of footsteps, and then the murmur of voices.

"Have you got them?" I heard a voice say

"Marry, no, but you have seen them?"

"No,"

"Then why did you give the signal?"

"We gave no signal. It was you who gave it."

"Gramercy, we gave it not; we heard it, and we have come."

"Hath no one seen them?"

All were silent, and then my heart began to beat with hope again. Evidently they had bungled the business, and I trusted that Mistress Faith had in some way discovered their plans. That was, perchance, the reason why she had not appeared.

"What can we do now?"

"We can do naught but wait. If we keep silence they will perchance come after all."

"And all the while they may be going we know not whither. Had we not better scour the country-side?"

"Aye, and what good? Naught is to be seen, and we know not whither they would go. Nay, we must wait, aye, wait till morning."

My heart sunk again at this, for truly I did not believe I could bear my position any longer.

Again there was a long silence, which was presently broken.

"What is that shadowy thing going across the common?"

"Naught, man. Your eyes be playing you tricks."

"But I saw something, I could swear by the mass I saw something."

"Then where is it? There is naught to be seen now."

"Perhaps it is some ghost from Hadley Church yard."

"I pray God it may not be."

"Tush, man!"

"I be right feared, I tell you. Right feared. I have heard many a time that Hadley church is haunted. And I have heard my father say that in the house opposite the church, where King Edward IV. slept the night before the battle of Barnet, fearful cries have been heard. A priest told him how he believed that the Earl of Warwick haunts the place because he had never a mass said for his soul. I have heard, too, that the ghost of the Earl hath been seen roaming through the churchyard, while the devil hath followed him close."

"Aye, but the devil hath got him long since if no masses have been said for his soul."

"I do not know. Men say he was of royal blood, and so escapes. But I like not staying here. What if the devil were to come here, and not a holy man among us? Lads, we can do no good here, let us go."

"Nay," said another, who seemed a leader. "Have done with such tales. You know our orders, we must stay here till morning."

"But I tell you I will not. Look, yonder is a light in the room where King Edward slept. It is getting late, too. It must be nearing midnight, for we have been here many hours."

"Nay, not midnight, the moon rises at midnight."

"No, not till an hour after. Aye, but I be sore afraid. There, I am sure I saw something black creep along!"

Now all this talk amused me much. At first I had hard work to keep from laughing, but afterwards I bethought me how I could turn it to good account, although the risk of doing so was very great.

"Aye, I believe I saw something," said another, "aye, but it is fearful to spend a night in such a ghost-ridden spot. By the mass, I am sure I heard a sound."

"Nay, you heard nothing."

"Aye, but I did."

At this moment I gave vent to the most awful cry of which I was capable. I had no great difficulty in uttering

a cry of pain and distress, because I was in sore pain at my long confinement, and I have no doubt that the sound I made was at once pitiable and terrible. Anyhow, the sound I made was immediately drowned in the wail of terror which the whole lot of them set up. A moment later they scampered across the common as though the furies themselves were at their heels, uttering the most fearful moans as they went.

I could scarcely help laughing, so merry did I feel at the success of my ruse; this, however, did not keep me from creeping out of my cold prison right quickly, and a minute later I was speeding down the hill, in the direction of Cockfosters, as fast as my legs would carry me. I had not gone far, however, when I came to a sudden halt, for I heard a woman's voice close to me.

"Stop, Master Hamstead," it said.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW I WAS RECEIVED AT HAMSTEAD MANOR

AS may be imagined, I did stop, for my heart was filled with a great hope. I did not speak, however, for, I was afraid lest by a hasty word I might spoil everything.

"Is that you, Master Hamstead?" said the same voice, and I thought it belonged to an old and toothless woman.

"Why?" I asked, "who are you?"

At this two dark forms crept towards me, clothed, as I thought, in some dark garb such as pilgrims wear.

"It is well," continued the voice, "and you have escaped the snare of the enemy."

I recognised the voice now as that of the old woman of whom the monk had spoken as his mother.

"Yes, I have escaped by a miracle," I made answer, and then I moved a step nearer. "Is that Mistress Faith?" I asked.

"Yes," was the reply, "are you sure you are safe and unhurt?"

"I am unhurt," I replied, "but we may not stay here. By a ruse I have frightened the Spaniard's spies away, but they are still in the neighbourhood, and if I mistake not we are surrounded on every hand."

"Surrounded, what mean you?"

Whereupon I related my experiences as quickly as I could, but not in a way to cause her fear. In truth, I raised a laugh to Mistress Faith's lips when I told her of what I had done.

"Whither shall we go?" she cried presently.

"We must not go near the high road," I made answer, "they will be watched everywhere, but I know a lonely lane which, although it winds a long way round, would bring us out by St. Albans town. It would add much to the distance, and would, therefore, take us much longer."

"Oh, I care not," was her reply. "I am not weary now, and if we walked right quickly we could get to St. Albans before daybreak."

"There is another plan," I said. "My home is much nearer than St. Albans, it may be that my father would give us shelter."

I said this hesitatingly, for I knew my father's views on the subject of traitors right well, and I doubted much whether, in spite of his love for me he would receive me kindly. Nay, rather, I felt afraid lest he should drive me from his doors, especially if he had heard aught from the emissaries of Stephen Gardiner. The monk's mother, however, fastened upon my words at once.

"Do this, young man," she cried, "do it, I tell you. Go to your father's house. You will be safe there."

"And what of you, good mother?" I asked.

"I shall return to my house," she replied. "You need have no fears for me. I have friends that you wot not of. With the maid I was in danger, but alone I am safe."

"And your son?" I asked suspiciously, for I was in doubts about him.

"He, too, will be safe," she replied quickly. "He hath done his best for you. He hath brought you together ten

miles from St. Paul's Cross; but for spies unknown you would not have been followed, but all is well now. Do as you said, and quickly. The maid must be weary, and she needs rest and care. With your sister, too, she will find suitable companionship."

"What know you of my sister?" I asked quickly.

"No matter what I know," replied the woman. "Suffice that I have tried to be a friend to you, and although my limbs are stiff and old, I have come here to this lonely place that I might befriend this hapless maid."

I had to be content with this, although I tried to make her say more, and as Mistress Faith appeared ill, and unfit for a long journey, I yielded to the old woman's desire to take her to my home, although I felt angry with myself for having said aught of Hamstead Manor, and this not because I did not desire to take her there, but because I sadly feared the welcome I might receive.

We all walked together for some distance, following a footpath which led to the foot of Barnet Hill, but we had not gone far when the old woman turned to leave us.

"All is well now, young man," she said. "I have done my duty as I promised. And now go, but before we part, take off the monk's gown you wear, and give it to me. I must take it back to my son."

This I did willingly, and glad was I when once more I was able to move my limbs freely, unhampered by a garb that was but little to my taste. Mistress Faith, however, still wore her strange attire which covered her from head to foot, and hid even her face from me.

"Play the man, Master Hamstead," continued the old woman, "methinks there are terrible times coming, and they who carry a sword should know how to use it."

"I will try, good mother," I replied, "and be pleased to tell your son that I thank him right heartily. Some day, perchance, I shall be able to do him a service."

But the dame answered not; she walked away quickly and was lost in the darkness.

"I would we had horses, Mistress Faith," I said.

But the maid made no reply as she trudged along by my side.

"You are weary, Mistress Faith," I said, "nay, you are weeping! Cheer up, all will soon be well."

This I said, yet little feeling the truth of my words, but it saddened me more than words can say to see her suffering.

"It is not of myself that I am thinking," she said.

"Not of yourself. Ah, then you think of your father, and your——" at this I stopped, vexed with myself for having come near to saying anything which must probe the wounds that hurt her so sorely. "But do not fear," I went on clumsily, "a brighter day will dawn, and then you will be happy again."

"Not while Queen Mary lives," she made answer, "and—and, Master Hamstead, I am distressed for you. I grieve now that I did not stay and be taken a prisoner.

"Why?" I asked in astonishment.

"Because I am wrecking your life, because I have caused you to make an enemy of the terrible Bishop. Take me back to him, Master Hamstead, take me back to him. I will take all the blame; nay, take me back to him as a prisoner, and you will receive' praise instead of censure."

"No, Mistress Faith," I said, "not while I have strength to draw a sword. You are weary and ill, and need rest. My sister Celia hath a kind heart, and will love you dearly. We are safe now, because I know a way to my father's house that the Spaniard's spies could never find."

"But you must not take me there, Master Hamstead. I remember what you said about your father."

"But I will," I replied, for what I had been afraid of a little time before, now seemed to me impossible. I felt sure that my father would welcome me gladly, and that when I had told my story, he would forgive me freely, and welcome Faith with kindness.

And so I spoke comforting words to her. telling her especially about my sister, until I had soothed her much, and caused her to dry her tears.

No mishap came to us on our journey, and when presently, the moon having risen, I saw my old home once more, my heart began to swell, and the tears came into my

eyes. For the house looked wondrously fair to me, after an absence of what seemed to me many years, and into my heart came a great hope, for I knew that my father loved me dearly. But upon Mistress Faith it had an opposite effect. She felt her loneliness and sorrow again, and desired to go on to St. Albans, for as she declared, she had no right to enter there, and in such circumstances must be ill received. To this, however, I would not listen, for now that I was once more in sight of the old place, I could not go away without seeking admission.

The maid, however, was right when she spoke of it as a strange time to enter. It was past midnight, and doubtless all the family would be abed. Besides, we were both mud-stained and weary, and must present a sorry sight to my father's gaze. Still I pressed on, for home is always home, and I hoped for the best.

"Look, there is a light in my father's bed-chamber," I said, "surely that is strange. Hath aught happened, I wonder?"

No sooner had I spoken, however, than I heard a great bark from Harry, the watch-dog, who came towards us with an angry growl. But when I spoke to him, however, his anger changed into joy, for he barked aloud and licked my hands as if in welcome. At first he seemed suspicious of Mistress Faith, but at my command he was kind to her, and then accompanied us towards the house.

The noise must have warned my father of our approach, for I saw a movement at the window, and then I heard his voice,

"Who is there?" he asked.

"It is I, father," I replied, "Dick, come home."

"And who have you with you?"

"Come down and let me in, father, I have much to tell you."

He must have been already dressed, for a minute later the door opened.

"What means this?" asked my father sternly.

He held a candle in his hand; but he needed not to do this, for the moon had now risen high enough to reveal us clearly.

"Let me come in and I will tell you."

I had barely entered the house, holding Mistress Faith by the arm, than I heard the rustle of robes, and I saw Celia coming towards me.

"Dick!" she cried, "Dick!" and she threw her arms around my neck and kissed me.

"Silence, child," said my father, "you will wake the servants, and that must not be."

I knew by the tone of his voice that he was not pleased, and I much feared lest he had received news from London. He led the way into the library, however, where a bright fire still burned.

Without a word he lit two or three candles, and then turned towards us again.

"Who is this you have with you?" he said.

I did not know how best to answer him, and I hesitated for a moment, but Mistress Faith hastily pulled aside the hood which had covered her face, and went towards him.

"Your son hath brought me here to save me from imprisonment,—and—and worse," said she quietly, "and if you are angry, and see aught to blame in him, it is not his fault, but mine."

I could not help looking towards her as she spoke, and my heart thrilled in spite of my fear. I had thought her beautiful before, but never so beautiful as then. Her face was very pale, and there were marks of weariness upon it, but it looked so pure, so free from guile, that no man could resist it. Her eyes, too, were full of pleading, but that was not all. They reflected a guileless soul, and the sweet modesty of one of the holiest maidens that ever trod the pathways of men.

I saw a change come over my father's face. I felt sure that he had had it upon his lips to say some hard words, but Mistress Faith's face had conquered him.

"Will you be pleased to sit down, young Mistress," he said, as courteously as if he had met a lady of high degree at a king's banquet.

"No, I cannot sit, Master Hamstead," said the maid piteously. "I am in great danger, and I will not rest here until you know why I have come."

There was a quiet dignity in her words, and my father knew that here was no play-actor woman, nor common person of any sort, but one who was his equal, and should be treated as such.

"It is well," said my father. "Pray tell me, then, who honours my roof with her presence."

"My name is Faith Bedford," she replied.

"Bedford! Child of Godfrey Bedford, heretic and outlaw!" cried my father. "I was right then, and the man told me truly."

Anger came into his eyes again, whereupon I could not help speaking.

"Let me tell you all, father," I cried, "then, perchance, you will understand why I have turned my face to my old home as a place of refuge. My heart has hungered for a sight of you all," and instinctively I drew Celia to me.

"Very well, speak," said my father, and thereupon I told him the story of what had happened since that October day when I set out from Hamstead Manor. At first he was not a sympathetic listener, but presently, when I told him of the meaning of Stephen Gardiner's commands, and of the way Godfrey Bedford had treated me, his face grew more kind. Moreover, I saw that he became excited when I told him of how Faith had visited me in my prison and had offered me my liberty; and I saw his teeth set hard when I came to the part of my story where I was fighting with two others, and was struck on the head from behind.

"It was a coward's blow!" he cried, "but go on, Dick."

So then I told him of my long illness in the lonely house, of my visit to London, and then of my determination to rescue Faith Bedford.

I think he became young again as I spoke, for his eyes flashed brightly, and he put his hand to his left hip as if feeling for a sword; and when I told him of my fight with Senor Toledo, he fair forgot himself.

"You tried the Cornish trick, did you, Dick?" he cried; "good! and you nearly crushed the life out of him, did you? I would like to have seen it! Aye, but marry,

Toledo is a——" and then he stopped like one betrayed into too much speech, "but go on, tell the rest of your story," he said presently.

Thereupon I told him as much as I thought wise, which my father enjoyed hugely. In truth, he seemed to forget himself while I told of my experiences on Hadley Common, and laughed like one tickled. He grew grave again presently, however, and I felt sure he had something upon his mind. Still he continued kind, and for this, as you may be sure, I was thankful.

"Celia, my child," he said presently, "take our visitor to your own bed-chamber, and keep her safe. Let no one enter the room. Prepare with your own hands some refreshment for her. As for you Dick, I have much to say to you alone."

My heart beat aloud with joy, for I knew that for a time Mistress Faith would be safe. It meant, too, that my father although he might be angry with me, did not intend driving me away as I feared he would.

So I bade good-night to Mistress Faith with a light heart, and told her to be of good cheer, and having kissed Celia again and again, I presently turned to my father.

"Thou art hungry, Dick!" he said.

"Aye, hungry enough!" I replied.

"Aye, and mud-stained, too. Your clothes be torn and rain-sodden. Get you to your chamber and put on something dry; after that come back here, for I have much to say."

I went to my old bedchamber like one in a dream. For a moment it seemed as though I had never been away at all, and was still a happy boy with not a care in life. But this feeling did not last long. I soon realised that I was regarded as a traitor, and that, perchance, my lord Bishop of Winchester had placed a price on my head. I quickly put on dry things, therefore, and a little later I found my way to my father's presence.

"Eat! drink!" he said, pointing to the table, and then I saw that he had brought food and wine for me with his own hands.

As may be imagined, I was not slow to obey him. I

attacked the savoury viands with a good appetite, indeed, I ate like a famishing man, as in truth I was.

"Have you finished?" he said at length.

I nodded contentedly, for the world seemed different to me now. It is wonderful what dry clothes and a hearty meal will do for a man's spirits. I was not at all dismayed at my prospects, and did not fear even the threats of the mightiest man in England.

"Then let us talk."

I drew a chair to the fire, which now, owing to the addition of fresh logs, burnt cheerfully, and as I did so noticed that the windows were closely shuttered.

"This is a bad way to get a knighthood," said my father.

"Yes, but what would you have done, father?" I asked.

"I might have been a fool, but that does not save you from being one."

"No," I said.

"I sent you out from here gaily attired, riding a good horse, with money in your pouch, and in good favour with the Queen's Chancellor. You return on foot, clothed like a begging clown, with a heretic woman by your side, and a price set upon your head."

I could not speak for I felt his words to be true.

"Even my house cannot shelter you for long."

"Why?" I asked quickly.

"Why? Because—but that will come out directly. For the first time, as far as I know, a Hamstead hath become a traitor. For the first time one bearing our name hath lifted his hands against the rulers of the land. It is a sad business, Dick, a sad business!"

"Is it, father?" I made answer, "it may be, and yet I would do it again. For no man with the blood of an English gentleman in his veins can stand by and see a helpless maid persecuted. While it was a question dealing with men, I did not budge an inch. I lifted not my hand on the side of Wyatt's rebels, I refused Godfrey Bedford when he made me fair promises, aye, I was loyal even when I saw the rotting carcases of ignorant fools hanging on gibbets up and down London streets; but I could not stand by and see an innocent maid made a

prisoner, and dealt with by a Spanish knave. You gave me a bad training for such work, father."

"Is this maid a sweetheart of yours?" he asked quickly; "have you paid court to this child of a heretic?"

"No," I answered, although my face was crimson as I spoke. "I should be a knave indeed to try and court such as she under such circumstances. Not but what I would like, father; but this is not a time for such things. The Queen's Chancellor hath given a warrant for her imprisonment; even on the day when her mother was buried (buried like a dog I am told, for no priest would say a prayer over her grave), men came to her home to drag her to a London prison. And I could not stand by and see it done. It may be that I disobeyed Stephen Gardiner, but—but—I could not help it," I added tamely.

My father wandered to and fro in the room for several minutes without speaking, then he burst out suddenly,

"You cannot stay here, Dick!"

I did not answer a word, for I saw he had more to say.

"You cannot stay here," he repeated, "in truth, this house will not be safe for twenty-four hours."

"No?" I said, "why?"

"Because that Spaniard, Toledo, left the house not two hours before you came, and will be here again in less than twenty-four hours from now."

CHAPTER XVII

THE WITCH OF ENDOR

"THE Spaniard! Toledo!" I cried.

"Aye," answered my father, "and for that reason, Dick, not a servant must know you are here. I cannot afford," he said more sternly, "to lose the confidence of the queen, not even to save you, Dick!"

I was silent, for I did not understand the tone in which he spoke.

"I knew most of your story before you told it," he went on. "Not that part of it which points to the knavery

of the Spaniard, but I knew you had gone to Barcroft Hall, knew you had spirited away the daughter of Godfrey Bedford, and knew that you were wandering around the country like a nameless beggar."

"Who told you?" I asked. "Ah, the Spaniard! Well!"

"Yes, he came a few hours ago, sent by my lord Bishop, to tell me that you had been a traitor, and that a warrant was given for your arrest."

I did not answer, for I saw that my father was much wrought upon.

"It was a sad blow, Dick," said my father, "a sad blow. I had dreamed bright dreams about you, my lad, I had seen you become a great man—and now—why, it is my duty to arrest you myself, it is my duty to take you at sunrise to London town, and deliver you both up to Stephen Gardiner to do with you as he thinks best."

"But you will not do it, father," I said.

"And why will I not do it, Dick?"

"For many reasons, father," I replied boldly. "One is that I love you, and you love me. Another is that I am your son, and you are my father, and a third is that if you had been in my place you would have done even as I have. Besides, he treated me not fairly. He sent me as a friend to Godfrey Bedford's house, and intended me as an enemy and a spy. He should not have sent my father's son on such an errand; for the rest—well, God knows I am no heretic, but I would do it again."

My father looked at me steadily without speaking, but there was a look of love in his eyes which assured me much.

"But do not fear, father," I went on, "I will take the maid to a place of safety, and then—well, I will go across to France, even as better men than I have had to do. But it seems hard," I added, "that free-born Englishmen should be beholden to French soil for liberty."

"Even French soil will not protect them long," he said.

"No perchance not," I replied, "for Stephen Gardiner is trying to draw all who oppose him into a net he is making. Even now he is moving heaven and earth to get the power from Parliament whereby he may deal with heretics

according to his will. In London streets men have to speak in whispers, for no man can call his soul his own. We are getting more and more under Spanish control, and soon we may expect to hear of burnings in England, even as there were in Spain a few years ago."

"Nay, nay, lad, the Spaniards only burnt Moors and Jews, none of us could ever stand by and see free-born Englishmen burnt, even although they were hot-gospellers."

"Then Stephen Gardiner speaks wrongly," I said, and I told him of what the Bishop of Winchester had said to me only a few days before.

"God grant you may be mistaken, lad," said my father slowly. "Nay, nay, it cannot be. True, the queen hath set her heart on Philip of Spain, and she hateth heresy, but she is a kind woman, Dick, and God save the queen. As for my lord Bishop—well, he is a man of God, and will do naught but what is good for the faith, and for the country."

In all this, as may be seen, my father had said but few upbraiding words. I saw that he was greatly grieved, but he was not angry, and this comforted me much, for I loved him truly, and it pained me to give him sorrow.

We talked together for a long time, then, after listening to many instructions, I went to bed, and slept as though not a care filled my mind. When I awoke, the day was far advanced, for it was broad daylight, and I heard a clock strike twelve. Upon this I dressed myself quickly, for I remembered that I must have slept eight good hours. Remembering my father's words, however, I dared not leave the room, neither did I make a noise, for this might betray my presence to the servants. As may be imagined I found keeping silence a hard matter, for I never could bear to be tied up like a bird in a springal. Good fortune, however, kept me from waiting long, for in a few minutes I heard some one touching the door-latch. So I went thither and listened.

"Dick!"

"Celia!"

"Yes, can I come in?"

I opened the door quickly, and Celia entered bearing a toothsome meal.

"I had a hard task to smuggle it without being seen, Dick, but I managed it."

"That is good of you, Celia," I said, kissing her; "but what of Mistress Faith?"

"Ah, she is well, and but for the loss of her mother would, I believe, be happy. Oh, she is just beautiful, Dick! And I do so love her."

"Yes," I answered, attacking my breakfast with heartiness, for loving Mistress Faith as I did, devotedly, and yet hopelessly, I was never like those love-sick swains of whom one reads in books, whose love keeps them from eating.

"And where is my father?" I asked.

"He is gone to London."

"What for?"

"To see my lord Bishop of Winchester."

I stared at her in astonishment, for I knew not what this portended.

"Left he any message for me?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

Celia went to the door and listened attentively, and then came back.

"It is only a few words, Dick," she said. "Start at midnight, and go to the stable first."

I nodded my head, for I thought I knew its meaning.

"What doth it mean?" asked Celia.

"Better you should not know, Celia," I said.

"But, Dick, you are not going away to-night?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"Because if I do not, Mistress Faith and myself may both be taken and thrown into prison, and, it may be, hanged."

"But what have you done?"

"I had better not tell you more than you know already."

At this my sister looked very serious, but presently she looked up with a bright smile.

"I am not going to be afraid, Dick dear," she said, "you are so strong and so clever that no one will take you."

My vanity was much pleased at this, although I said

nothing, for, in truth, I felt less confidence than she. None the less, my determination was strong.

I did not see Mistress Faith until an hour before midnight, when the servants were abed. My father had not returned from London, and so Celia and myself were alone with her. I did not speak to her of the thoughts which had been passing through my mind during the day, however, simply because, although I knew Celia to be faithful to me, I did not wish her to know whither we had gone. For I feared Toledo much. He had been to the house, and he would come again, and I knew that he would leave no stone unturned to find out what had become of Faith and myself. I knew, too, that he would quickly find out from my sister if she knew whither we had gone, and if need be against her will.

After a few minutes, however, Celia left us a little time together alone.

"Do you still desire to go to the house of your old serving-woman?" I asked.

"There is no other place to which I can go," she made answer.

"Your uncle's house," I suggested.

"No, no, I dare not."

"Doth Toledo know of this woman at St. Albans? Have you ever mentioned her in any of your conversations?"

"No, never."

I thought of my conversation with the monk, I called to mind the circumstances under which our plans had been discussed, and I remembered nothing which could lead to any one thinking of St. Albans.

"Will you tell me about this woman?" I said. "You say she was a serving-woman of yours. Why did she cease to live with you?"

"Her name is Dorcas Udy," she said, "and she was my nurse for years."

"And why did she leave you?"

She married a servant of Sir George Buckler. Sir George visited our house and brought the man Levi Udy with him. This led to their marriage."

"And you are sure that she is in every way trustworthy?

Forgive me for asking, but it seems to me that very much depends on this hiding-place."

"Yes, I am sure she is trustworthy. She was always very kind to me, and refused to marry Udy until I was more than twelve years old. Since then she hath often sent her love to me, and told of her desire to see me. She is a wise woman, too, and can, I believe, give me much help."

"A wise woman?"

"Yes, she can read the future."

I do not know whether I was most pleased, or vexed at this. For, in truth, I liked not these wise women over much, for while it is doubtless true that some have the power to read the stars and can look into the future of men and women, I had a distinct dislike for witchcraft or anything that pertained thereto.

"Doth she carry on the trade of telling fortunes?" I asked.

"No, but when I was a child she often told of what would happen, and I never knew her mistaken. I know she loves me, and I am sure she could tell me what to do."

"I do not much believe in such," I made answer.

"Neither do I," she answered, "but I know that Dorcas loveth me, and I am sure she would help me."

At this my objections began to fall down.

Moreover, while I loved not witchcraft, which is strictly forbidden by the Church, I hoped that if this Dorcas Udy were truly a wise woman and could read the stars, she would be able to tell us what to do, especially as she had been the nurse of Mistress Faith, and loved her truly.

"Know you where she lives?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied, "for Levi Udy hath told me where the house lies. I could find it easily from what he hath told me, and there is no other house near."

I gave an unwilling consent, and right sorry was I afterwards that I did so, for as you will presently see, our journey there led to grave consequences. Still, as I said, what could I do? Even my father, known as a champion for the old faith, dared not give me shelter, how then could I expect others to befriend us?

A few minutes before midnight, in obedience to my father's commands, I found my way to the stables. This I did with great quietness, and having arrived there I saw two horses standing, while two saddles were placed near.

"God bless you, father," I said, as the tears started to my eyes, for I saw that his great love was doing its best for me. I verily believed at that time, moreover, that he had gone to London to throw my enemies off the scent; but of this I was not sure

Having saddled and bridled the horses, I found my way back to the house again, and after having kissed my sister Celia many times, I led Mistress Faith towards the stables. It was yet dark, for, as I have said, the moon was on the wane, and thus would be an hour later in the rising, but as I knew my way well there was no difficulty. Even while I led the horses though an unfrequented road, I made no mistakes, for I knew every creek and corner of Hamstead Manor by heart. I remember that I was in high good spirits, too, for although the future was utterly uncertain, I was much refreshed by my rest, and by the good food my sister Celia had prepared for me. Besides this, I was no longer harrassed by grim forebodings concerning my father's anger. I reflected that he had received me with kindness, although with sorrow, and this immediately after a visit from Toledo. Doubtless I had disappointed him much, and yet I knew by the look in his eyes, that he would have done even as I had.

More than all this, Mistress Faith was by my side, and I was rendering service to the maid I loved. True, she did not even guess of the fires that were burning in my heart, neither had she feelings towards me stronger than those of gratitude, but I could not help rejoicing that she was with me, even though our every step were beset with danger.

For some time she spoke not a word, but kept close to me, as I led the horses through the woods; presently, however, she bade me stop.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I am sure we are followed!" she whispered.

I listened attentively, but heard no sound.

"It is your fancy, Mistress Faith," I said, "have no

fear, I will take you safely to this Dorcas Udy's house. My only fear is that the hiding-place she may provide will not be sufficient."

"If once we get there, I shall not be afraid—for myself," she made answer, "but what will you do?"

"Have no fear for me," I replied with an assurance which I did not feel, "when once I know you are safe I shall not have a care."

"Oh, you are kind to me, Master Hamstead," she said. "I pray God that some day I may be able to make it up to you."

At this my heart beat fast, and hasty words were on my lips in a moment, but I held them in check, for I knew she spoke only in gratitude.

"It is but little I can do," I replied, "and I shall be more than repaid in knowing you are safe."

I did not dare speak to her about what would become of her father, also of her old home, for I knew that my words would betray my fears. In truth, I felt sure that in the present temper of the queen, and her Chancellor, the Barcroft lands would be taken from her, and she would be left homeless. I knew, too, that should Godfrey Bedford be taken he would as surely be hanged or beheaded as that there would be roast beef for the next Christmas dinner.

"Hush," she said again presently.

Again I stopped the horses and listened, but no sound reached me, save the creaking of the boughs above our heads, as the wind found its way through the trees.

Presently we reached the high-road, and then I thought my troubles were at an end, for I knew that the horses were good, and that Mistress Faith could ride (just as every true English gentlewoman should) the fleetest horse that could be saddled for her. I therefore helped her to mount, and was about to spring on my horse's back, when some one darted from the roadside and caught her rein.

"Will you give a groat to a poor man?" said the knave, and I was sure I heard a laugh in his whine.

"Who are you, fellow?" I asked.

"Oh, an honest man!" was the reply. "I was ostler till last week up at the Barley Sheaf, but I was sacked, and so——"

I cut him short. "Let go the bridle, knave," I cried, but the fellow laughed and held it fast.

At this I heard horses' hoofs, and by the sound, they came from Barnet, and then a fear got hold of me. I also heard rustling among the bushes near by, and I knew we had been entrapped. Doubtless, there had been spies around all the day, and all the night, and thus we had run into a trap, just as a rabbit runs into a snare.

I did not wait to parley, however, and I was on the horse's back before any one could well count five, and before the fellow knew what I was up to, I drew my sword and struck at his arm.

Immediately he dropped the bridle with a howl, and then I gave Mistress Faith's horse a tap with the flat of my sword, and we started on our gallop.

"You are not hurt?" I asked of her.

"Not a whit," and I knew by her tones that she had no fear, and that the excitement of the moment had nerved her for any daring.

"We shall give them the slip," I said, with a laugh, for truly I forgot the danger, and enjoyed the fun, but the sound of horses' hoofs behind me gave the lie to my words.

"The Spaniard is as wily as the devil," I said between my teeth.

She did not reply, but galloped silently by my side.

"We have all on our side," I went on, "our horses are fresh, and, perchance, they have come from London"

"But one horse is getting near us," she answered, and I thought how quick her hearing must be.

"We cannot go to Dorcas Udy's now," she went on, "for they will know whither we have gone, and follow us."

I had thought of this, but I did not speak of it for fear of giving her unnecessary pain. Meanwhile one of our pursuers came nearer and nearer, so near, in truth, that presently I heard him shout, "Stop in the queen's name!"

But I heeded him not, for my brain was busy in thinking how to get out of our scrape.

"Stop, in the name of the queen, stop, or I fire!" but still I paid no heed. I knew that we were riding for liberty, if not for life.

A minute later a pistol ball whizzed near me, but it did not touch either of us.

"I wonder how, many 'dags' you carry?" I thought to myself. "If only two, then we may have a chance even yet." At that moment I heard another report, and Mistress Faith's horse gave a great side leap which nearly unseated her, then the animal stumbled sorely.

"Are you hurt?" I asked.

"No, but the horse is struck somewhere. I do not think he can carry me far."

"I command you to stop in the name of the queen," repeated the voice from behind.

I had my sword unsheathed all the time, and I slacked my horse's speed so as to keep pace with Mistress Faith's steed, which stumbled more and more. Evidently our pursuer noted this, for he cried out, "I command you to stop in the name of the queen, Master Richard Hamstead." But I did not answer him back, for I had made up my mind what to do.

"Be ready to dismount, Mistress Faith," I said to her. "I think your horse will fall; but be not afraid."

Then I checked my horse's speed still more, so that our pursuer came close upon us. Now, I have never loved attacking a man who is unprepared, always believing in a fight there should be no disadvantage; but this was not a time for scruples, so I held myself in readiness for him as he, evidently thinking I intended to yield, rode up.

"Master Richard Hamstead, yield to me as my prisoner," he cried, "I have——"

But before he finished speaking, I made a savage lunge at him, and ran my sword through his body. The man gave a hoarse cry and fell from his horse without a struggle. No sooner did he fall than I turned round and saw that Mistress Faith had dismounted, and that her horse had fallen.

There was no time for waiting, especially as I thought I heard the sound of horses in the distance. I therefore jumped off my horse, took off the saddle from Mistress Faith's fallen steed, then having unsaddled the animal that had been pursuing us, I threw her saddle on his back and in a twinkling we were riding again, as fast as we could go. Whether the man I had run through the body were dead or no, I wot not; in truth, so excited was I that I cared not, for it is doubtless a fact that even Christian men become like savages when there is fighting to be done.

"We dare not stay at St. Albans," said Mistress Faith, who had never once lost her presence of mind in spite of our danger.

"No?" I made reply, "and why not?"

"Because they are so close behind. There can be only two or three miles between us."

"All the more reason for staying," I made answer. "Since Mary hath come to the throne St. Albans hath been full of monks and priests. For that reason the Spaniard and his spies will never believe we should think of staying there. Is the woman's house this side St. Albans or the other?"

"The other."

"Then we will gallop through the town boldly," I made answer. "If we meet any man we will ask the road to Bedford, so that if our pursuers see him and ask him any question, he can tell them what we said to him. All the same, we will turn into this Dorcas Udy's house. Perchance if she be a witch she will know of our coming."

At this I called to mind that I had heard of a witch residing at St. Albans whom the people called the Witch of Endor, but, strange to say, I had never associated her with Dorcas Udy until this moment.

We galloped through St. Albans without let or hindrance.

It is true that when I saw a watchman I asked him if we were on the road to Bedford, but I know not to this day what answer he made. The great Abbey on our left looked solemn and grey in the dim light, and I remember wondering if the monks there would light the faggots

to burn heretics. I reflected, however, that since Henry's days they had been little more than wandering beggars and knew not how many still lived there.

Presently, after we had passed the town some little distance, I saw a twinkling light away to the left.

"That must be Dorcas Udy's house," cried Faith.

Seeing a narrow lane leading towards it, I hesitated not, but rode as fast as I could in the direction of the light. A few minutes later we had come up to what might be a small farm-dwelling.

"Who might you be?" said a man's voice.

"Doth Mistress Dorcas Udy live here?" I asked.

"Aye, that she doth, but you be late, my master. The moon hath risen, and nothing can be told after moon-rise.

"Still, I must see her, and that right quickly, Levi Udy," I made answer. "This gentlemaid hath ridden far to see her."

"But she is abed, or I think so. God knows I would be there too but for the lambing season."

At this the door opened, and I heard a woman's voice.

"What's the matter, Levi, and who have you here?" she asked.

"Do you not know me, Dorcas?" cried Faith, "do you not remember me down at Barcroft?"

"Mistress Faith!" she cried.

"Yes," said the maid, "and I am in sore straits. I am in danger of my life."

Either the woman had received some information, or she was quick-witted beyond anyone I had ever seen.

"Pursued by the queen's spies because of your father, my dear mistress," she said, "aye, and in danger of being taken for a heretic."

"Yes," cried Faith.

"Then none shall hurt you while I have breath in my body," said the dame quickly, and then she turned to me. "This is Master Richard Hamstead?" she said.

"Yes." I cried, "shelter us for God's sake. They be close behind."

The woman hesitated not for a single moment.

"Levi," she said, "take the horses, you know where.

Make no noise, be quick, and hold your tongue." Then she turned to us. "Come in, my dear mistress," she said, "and you, young master, you come in too."

No sooner had we entered than she blew out the candle.

"Not a word, not a sound," she said in a whisper. "You must tell me nothing to-night, my dear mistress. You are weary. I have a bed all ready for you. As for you, young master, there is a little hutch behind the spence. But stay, do you need food?"

"No," I said, "we have had food."

"That is well," said Dorcas Udy. "I felt you were coming," and then she led Mistress Faith away, without another word.

I waited in the little kitchen in silence, for I was stunned at the quick movements of the woman, and her apparent knowledge of all that had happened.

Five minutes later she came back again.

"Master Hamstead," she whispered..

"Yes."

"Have you heard aught?"

"No."

"That is well. My mistress is safe. Now let me take you to the only place I have where you may sleep."

She opened a door, and a minute later I found myself in a little linhay-roofed room, which was dimly lighted by the moon's rays through a window-place, in which, however, there was no glass.

"Lie on the ferns, young master, and make no noise. You are safe here. No one will think you are at the house of the Witch of Endor."

I started but spoke not.

"Good-night, young master, and sleep soundly," she whispered, then she left me. A few moments later not a sound was to be heard.

I lay down on the ferns, but, as may be fancied, I slept not for a long time. My mind was too excited. In truth I did not believe I should be able to sleep at all.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW I SOUGHT TO OUTWIT THE SPANIARD

HOW long I stayed there alone, I know not, for I was busy trying to make my plans for the future, and that, too, without much success. And this, you will understand as well as I, if you think a minute how matters stood. It is true a man with cleverer brains than mine, or one who was accustomed to scheming, might have seen his way clearly, and might have devised means of safety with ease; but I could not. In truth, I felt as helpless as a baby, and this for many reasons. Some of these I will set down for fear those who read this may judge me to be a greater dullard than I really was, and no man is desirous of being thought a fool. Be pleased to remember, then, that in and all around London the Wyatt rebellion had made every man suspect his neighbour, and while Queen Mary had put it down with a firm hand, she was fearfully jealous of any other movement against her. It was thought at the time, moreover, that there was a further plot and intrigue to marry the Princess Elizabeth to my Lord Courtenay, and throw Mary from the throne, and it must be remembered that for this reason Stephen Gardiner, the cleverest man in England, had such an army of spies as England had never known before. Well, I had befriended the child of a man who was almost as renowned as Wyatt himself, and she was one of the heretics whom both Queen Mary and Gardiner hated with a hatred which men in these days cannot understand. A warrant was out against both of us, and the Queen's spies were scouring the country-side. Ever since the death of Edward those of the Reformed faith had either been suffering the anger of the authorities, or they had changed their religion to suit the times. As a consequence no one dared shelter an acknowledged heretic, and especially was there danger in giving help to the child of Godfrey Bedford. 'Every

port was guarded, and every man looked on his fellow-man with either hatred or fear. Rewards were offered to those who would betray any man who hinted at treason, and punishments were meted out to people who even gave the semblance of friendship to men who were not for ever shouting, "God save the queen." All these facts stared me in the face, nor was this all. I had as my enemy, not only Stephen Gardiner and Bishop Bonner, but the Spaniard, who was as cunning as the devil, and who hated me beyond words. Superstitious as all the Spaniards were, he had been led to believe that I was his rival, and I could not but admit the fact that what he believed was in part true; for while Mistress Faith cared naught for me, save as a friend and helper, I loved her like my own life. He had followed us to the house of Dorcas Udy, and while for the time he had been thrown off the scent, we were in great danger. For, in truth, I could not believe that Mistress Faith was safe at this woman's house. We were but little more than twenty-five miles from St. Paul's Cross, and close to the highway, and if there was but a suspicion that Mistress Faith was there, her liberty, and perchance her life, were scarcely worth a groat.

As I said, therefore, a cleverer man might have seen a way to safety, but I saw none. I did not feel that Mistress Faith was removed from danger, and yet I knew of no place where she should be better situated. If I stayed in the neighbourhood I could do her no good, and I myself would be in danger every minute, yet if I went away I should be leaving her alone with a woman, who, although kindly disposed, might be haled up before my lord Abbot any day as a witch. I knew, moreover, that the Spaniard would never rest while I was above ground, and I was sure that the woman I loved would never be safe while he lived.

And so, as I bethought me of all these things, my heart grew heavy as lead, and I wot not how the time went, forgetting even the hunger which was strong upon me.

At length Dorcas Udy opened the door, and without a word, beckoned me to follow her. This, as you may be sure, I was not slow in doing, for I greatly longed to see

Mistress Faith, and to hear from her own lips how she fared, and I trusted that the woman purposed to lead me to her. I followed her quickly up a narrow stairway, and along a passage, until I reached the room where Mistress Faith sat. I saw then that Dorcas Udy's house was better adapted to our purpose than I had thought, for the room was curiously situated, and really belonged to one of the farm-buildings which joined the dwelling-house. The window, moreover, was in the roof, and to an ordinary looker-on it would seem from the outside as though it were not a chamber at all, but only a part of the out-buildings. When the dame had shut the door, moreover, and strongly barred it, we were well shut out from everything, and felt safer than had been my lot for many hours.

It gave me much joy, moreover, to see Mistress Faith again, especially as I saw by her face that she had rested well, and that in spite of all her anxieties, a look of hope shone from her eyes.

She greeted me kindly, too, just as a sister might, and while it gave me joy to feel that she trusted me, the very absence of embarrassment and blushes on her part made me feel that she had no other feeling towards me than gratitude.

"You have rested well, I trust?" I said awkwardly.

"I could not sleep for hours," she said, with a slight shudder, "for I was constantly thinking of the man you killed."

"I could not help it, it was our only chance," I answered.

"He is not dead, dear mistress," said Dorcas Udy, "and he will get better."

"How do you know?" asked Mistress Faith.

The woman looked confused, I thought, but said stammeringly—

"Your old Dorcas knows many things, dear mistress, and she hath never deceived you."

"I wish it had been Toledo!" I could not help saying.

"Why, have you seen him?" said the girl fearfully.

"No, I have not seen him," I said, "but he is always our enemy."

"But you will not let him harm me?" said Faith, turning towards Dorcas Udy.

"Harm you, my dear mistress?" said the woman, "no, he shall not harm you; but as for Master Richard Hamstead—well, he must leave as soon as it is dark to-night."

Then, while I sorrowed much to see the look of pain in Mistress Faith's eyes, it rejoiced me that she would feel sorrow at my absence.

"The Spaniard is very cunning," she went on, "but I have been making my plans, and I will outwit him, or my name is not Dorcas Udy."

"What plans?" I asked eagerly.

"Well, you may not stay here," she went on. "It will not be safe, neither could I hide one whose face is not unknown in these parts. You could not lie in the shed all the time, like a badger in a hole, and if you showed your face even to the lambs in the meadows, the Spaniard would know of it before the sun went down."

I saw the truth of this, but all the same, I laughed, for in spite of everything, my good spirits gat hold of me. It is a trick of youth to be for ever putting off the evil day, and now that I had eaten of the breakfast which Dorcas had placed upon the table, I felt as though I was more than a match for the Spaniard, not only in strength, but in wits also. Besides, Mistress Faith was by my side, and looked upon me as a trusted friend, and so I could not but be hopeful and gay.

All the same, I was not short-sighted about Dorcas Udy's plans, and listened to them with great intentness.

"What would you?" I asked her eagerly, "how will you outwit the Spaniard?"

"This way!" replied Dorcas. "He will be watching at the Great Elms, the house of my lord John Bedford. He will not dare enter there, for it is not a place where Spaniards can freely poke their noses. But he must see you there, and send part of his men to follow you. You must outride them all, and escape; and then the Spaniard will think that Mistress Faith is at her uncle's house."

"But this will be very dangerous for Master Hamstead," said Mistress Faith, at the which my heart beat fast. Not

that I feared the danger, thank God, but because her words showed that she was thoughtful for my welfare.

"That is not sufficient, Dorcas," I said, "not that I fear either the Spaniard or his followers. Give me a good horse, and I will show them all a clean pair of heels. It is not that. Our plans must make Mistress Faith safe, and this is not provided for by yours. If I ride away from Great Elms alone Toledo will naturally suspect that Mistress Faith is at her uncle's; but he will quickly discover that this is not so, and this will tell him that we have practised a ruse, and then, perchance, his suspicions may lead him here. Now, this must not be. Our work is to make him believe that she hath accompanied me to some far-off place, so that his thoughts shall never rest upon this house."

"Aye, but thou art not a fool, Master Hamstead, for all thy simple looks," cried the dame, while Mistress Faith looked at me with approving eyes. "But what would you?" continued Dorcas presently.

"I must be seen ride away with a maid of some sort," I said, at the which Dorcas clapped her hands, and Mistress Faith looked thoughtful beyond her years. "This might be done e'en this night," I went on, "if I could find some wench willing to accompany me on a wild ride northward."

"Aye, but the maid," said Dorcas, "where could you find one willing for such work?"

"I must think," I said. "Up to the present the Spaniard doth not suspect our whereabouts, and I would be willing to stake Hamstead Manor, if it were mine, that he and a dozen of his men be watching all the roads around Master John Bedford's house, in the hopes of finding Mistress Faith."

"But then," said Dorcas, "if you were to ride thither with some wench you would be captured, and the maid likewise."

"Even so," I made answer, "and perchance we should both be taken to London forthwith; but what of that! Mistress Faith would be safe."

"No, no, I would not have that," cried she eagerly. "You must not be taken, Master Hamstead. I could not allow it."

"I would take good care I was not taken," I replied; "given the maid could ride well, I would give them all the slip; but if the worst came to the worst, well, then our object were accomplished."

"But the maid, where can she be found?" cried Dorcas.

"Aye, there's the rub," I made answer; "know you of one, Dorcas?"

"I know a wench who hath come to me many a time to have her fortune told, and would love nothing better than to run away with a handsome fellow like thee."

"Nay, but there must be none of that," I said; "I would have none fancy I am anything of a lover."

"But in what other way can one be induced to take a midnight ride?"

"Is there not one who will do aught for thee, Dorcas? Know you of no one who, through love or fear, or because of hope of something that you can do, could be trusted to help us?"

"The woman should be of gentle birth," said Dorcas, like one musing, "or she should appear as if she were."

"Aye, that would be best," I answered. "I suppose you know no one?" I continued, turning to Mistress Faith.

"No, I know of no one. All I knew at Barcroft deserted our house when my father fled to France. Even Leah Varley left us, I know not why."

"Leah Varley," cried Dorcas Udy quickly. "Is she of demure countenance and of soft voice?"

"Yes," cried Mistress Faith, "know you of her?"

"She hath been to me to have her fortune told," replied Dorcas; "she came with Sir George Kenelm's eldest daughter when the moon was full less than a week ago."

"Sir George Kenelm!" I cried, "of Kenelm Towers, about three miles from here?"

"Yes," replied Dorcas, "know you him?"

"Nay," I replied, "but I know of him. A man who was of the Reformed faith under Edward, and of the old faith under Mary. Know you if Mistress Leah Varley is with him?" I asked, turning to Mistress Faith.

"I know not whither she went when she left us," replied

the maid, "but I know she seemed sore grieved to go away from me, and had, I am sure, great love for me."

"Then why did she go?" I asked.

"I know not, but I think it was because my father willed that none should suffer because of us. This was what my mother told me," and I saw the tears well up in the maid's eyes.

"Knew she the Spaniard?" I asked.

"Aye, but she hated him. This she told me many times."

At this I fell to musing, for I thought I saw in Mistress Leah Varley one who might help us.

"It might be Providence itself," I said presently, "provided it be as you say. If she loveth you, and hateth the Spaniard, she would perchance do this for your safety. But it meaneth great risk."

"There can be nothing done without risk," said Dorcas. "The plan seemeth good, Master Hamstead. I know that he with his men will be watching the roads around the Great Elms. Let him see you and the maid ride along as if in great haste, and we have accomplished our ends. Mistress Faith can then stay here till it is safe for her to go to her father, and no one will be the wiser."

We talked of this for a long while, and I thought Mistress Faith favoured the plan, but for myself, I had sore doubts. And yet what could I do? It seemed most necessary that I should lead the Spaniard away from the neighbourhood of St. Albans, and to do this I could think of no better plan than to let him see me accompanying a maid northward. Mistress Leah was of about the same height as Faith, and in the dark, if she were carefully hooded, would naturally be taken for her. There was danger on every hand, but if I succeeded I might foil our enemies. On the other hand, if I were taken, well, I was willing to suffer for Mistress Faith, and it might be that the fact of Mistress Leah Varley being with me, might deceive the Spaniard as well as even Stephen Gardiner.

Anyhow, after many plans had been discussed, many alternatives considered, and much advice given by Dorcas

Udy, I made up my mind to go across country to Kenelm Towers that very night, to seek an interview with the woman to whom I had first spoken at Barcroft Hall months before.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GREAT DARKNESS

NOW the means whereby I was to obtain speech with Leah Varley were devised by Dorcas Udy, and so simple was her plan that it appealed to me good the moment she had set it forth. As the dame had said, Mistress Leah Varley together with Lady Betty Kenelm had come to her house the week before to have their fortunes told. They were accompanied by a serving-maid, Jane Bennetts by name, who had been at Kenelm Towers for many years, Now, it was my plan to go to the kitchen door and ask for this wench, who would take my message to Mistress Varley. I therefore wrote a letter with great care, and then, directly after sunset, made my way across the fields to Kenelm Towers. I accomplished this journey without mishap of any sort, and in less than an hour stood at the kitchen door.

I heard great laughter as I knocked, and from this I made up my mind that Sir George Kenelm was away from home, else surely the servants would not be so free in their behaviour. When I knocked at the door, however, the noise was somewhat lessened, but not much, and it was some time before any one answered my summons.

"I would see Jane Bennetts," I said to the sour-faced woman who opened the door.

"Jane Bennetts, that's me," she answered sharply, "who be you?"

"One who hath heard good things of you, Jane," I answered, whereupon the woman's face became somewhat softened.

"You be a stranger," she made answer, "what do you want?"

"I would speak with you, Jane," I answered, "and I thank my lucky stars that it is you who have answered my knock."

"And why, young man?" she asked.

"Well," I said, "the reason should be plain. We be both young, Jane" (whereupon she simpered finely), "and so it is not strange that we should both go to have our fortunes told."

"How do you know I went to have my fortune told?" she asked in a shamefaced way.

"Did not the dame tell you of a sturdy fellow, with dark eyes, and a well-shaped leg?" I asked.

"Well, and what then?"

"Why, then, is it any wonder that when I visited her she should tell me where to come," I made answer. "If mistresses have their fortunes told, why not maids? and though I only bring a letter for the mistress, why should I not bring myself to the maid who is better favoured than the mistress?"

Now, I am afraid I was raising false hopes in Jane's heart, for I afterwards learned that she was the only maid-servant at Kenelm Towers who had no sweetheart, and that she went to see Dorcas Udy in the hope of getting one. Like most unmarried women who have passed thirty, moreover, she was right silly about the business, and so she just listened to me as if she were but sixteen instead of thirty-six.

"Did she tell you my name?" she asked eagerly.

"Aye, that she did," I replied, "and I have been much distressed lest I should not get speech with you."

Now if the truth must be told, I spent ten good minutes with Jane Bennetts before I dared speak of Mistress Leah Varley and I am afraid said many foolish things to her, for love-making comes natural to youth, even though he be playing at it. But she listened with eager ears, and at length told me that she had dreamed of some one like me only the night before, whereupon, although it was sore against my taste, I kissed her in a lover-like fashion.

"And now," I said presently, "seeing I am so happy myself, I wish you to take a letter to Mistress Leah Varley,

who hath had dreams like yours, and if we be fortunate, Jane, well, then, who knows but I may see you often! For if my master comes to see her—well, what is there more natural than that I should come with him?"

"I always said she was a sly thing," said Jane.

"Who, Mistress Leah?"

"Yes, have you ever seen her?"

"Once, when she was staying at another place. So be pleased to take this letter to her at once, for I must have private speech with her, and take back her answer."

"I was always sure she had a lover," said Jane, "for although she hath been here but a few weeks, I have seen her go out after dark alone."

Now this troubled me somewhat, and I asked the wench several questions about it, but I got nothing further of importance, and then after many smirks and smiles on her part, and many silly speeches on mine, she took the letter I had brought.

A few minutes later she returned again, and told me that Mistress Varley would meet me under the big oak by the drive in a few minutes, so after much ado, for the wench really believed that she had got a lover at last, I got away from her, but not until she had led me to make many false promises.

"They can't say I've not a sweetheart now, can they?" she said, like a creature demented. "Every one of them hath been courted but me, and they have teased me dreadfully. Sir George and my lady be away, and so the maids have got their sweethearts in the kitchen, and that is why I had to come to the door."

I hurried away, wondering how a woman of that age could be so crazy, and I could not help laughing as I thought of my fooling. Still, after all, I had, by making love to her, gained my ends without suspicion, and so I blessed my stars that such old maids be so silly.

The trysting place was reached without trouble, but when I got there, I bethought me of the difficult task I had in hand. To gain the ear of a serving-maid was one thing, but to succeed in my purpose with Mistress Leah Varley was another. For, in truth, I was not sure of her

faithfulness. I reflected that if she had really loved Mistress Faith she would have remained with her in her trouble, in spite of Mistress Bedford's words.

I had not waited long under the great oak, when I saw a woman coming towards me alone, and when we stood face to face, I saw that it was Mistress Leah Varley.

"Master Hamstead!" she cried.

"Yes," I said in a low voice; "but speak not loud, for I desire not that any one save you shall know who I am."

We quickly got to the matter I had in my heart, and it surprised me much at the quickness with which she understood me. Moreover, she was not long in telling me of her great love for Mistress Faith, and how she was broken-hearted when Mistress Bedford bade her leave Barcroft Hall. So much did she impress me by this that my suspicions began to leave me, and although I felt my way very carefully, she quickly led me to tell of Mistress Faith's whereabouts, and of what I had done to help her. I was right glad, as may be imagined, when she fell eagerly in with my plans, and promised me that she would gladly ride with me along the roads near the Great Elms, and that if we were captured, she would be faithful to her friend. Nay,more, she would make it appear, she said, that it was she whom I had taken from Barcroft Hall, and not Mistress Faith at all, and in this way make my own offence less black in the eyes of Stephen Gardiner. Moreover, as she assured me, I could not have come at a better time, for Sir George and Lady Kenelm being away, no questions would be asked about her absence, and as Lady Betty was very romantic, she would be able to settle matters with her without difficulty. In truth, so eagerly did Mistress Varley fall in with my plans that I felt myself in luck's way, and I rejoiced that I had got a woman on my side who was so full of sense.

Presently, however, when the clock struck, she grew, as I thought, restless, and seemed anxious to go back to the house, so after having fixed to meet me at four cross roads, about a mile from St. Albans town, to which spot I should bring the horses, I left her, and went back to Dorcas Udy's house with a light heart.

As may be imagined, I took great care in not being seen when I drew near the place where Faith was in hiding, for I knew that Toledo was as cunning as the devil I reflected that he had been much guided by such as she, indeed, he had learnt to hate me even before he had seen me, (because he had been warned that a man bearing my name should be his rival,) and that he had also determined on my death. I crept cautiously forward therefore, often stopping to listen, and taking note even if a twig snapped.

I had reached the last meadow when I heard a low "hist," which brought me to a full stop. Whereupon a man came out from behind a tree amd came towards me.

"Don't go in yet," said the man.

"Is that Levi?" I asked.

"Aye," was the reply. "Don't go in yet, he's there!"

"The Spaniard?"

"Aye, the Spaniard."

Although I had prepared for this, the man's words startled me.

"Do not be afraid, young master," he went on, "my wife be a wise woman, and never do make mistakes. I be a-waiting' for 'er whistle, and then you may go in."

"How long hath he been at the house?" I asked.

"I know nothin'," was the reply. "I don't want to know nothin', my wife be a wise woman, and so I find it pay to do just as she do tell me. Besides, I do find enough to do, to keep the farm goin'."

I asked other questions, but I could get nothing further from him. His wife did all the thinking, he informed me. and it paid him best to do as she told him.

"Ef ever you do get married, young man," he volunteered at length, "look out for a woman with sense, one whose mind is 'eavy with judgment, and then do as she do zay. It'll make life uncommon aisy. Some men do stick up to ther wives, and they be all the time fallin' out. I do never fall out with my wife, I jist do what she do zay, and ax no questions, and that's the secret of a aisy life, young master."

Whether this may be advice to be acted upon generally,

I will volunteer no opinion, but I am sure it worked well in Levi Udy's case. Dorcas was a shrewd woman, and managed her husband to perfection, and I am sure that Levi would be utterly helpless without her.

Presently I heard the clatter of hoofs, and then shortly after, a sound, not unlike that of a night-crow reached my ears.

"You may go in now," remarked Levi, with a sigh of satisfaction, "and you may thank your lucky stars that you've got such a woman as my Dorcas to help you."

"Aren't you coming in?" I ventured.

"No, 'tis lambin' season, and I don't want to know nothin' 'bout you, young master. If I did, I might be tempted to put my finger in the pie, and then I should burn my fingers."

Then Levi left me, and was soon lost in the darkness of the night.

"Well?" was Dorcas Udy's greeting.

"Well," I answered, "and so the Spaniard hath been here."

"Yes," said Dorcas, "he hath discovered that no one hath been to the Great Elms, and so he came back so that I might read his fortune in the stars."

"And what did you tell him?"

"I may not tell you," said the dame. "The fortunes of the day may be told to all, but not those of the night."

"Nonsense!" I made answer, for I had but little faith in the woman's powers of fortune-telling.

"Hark 'ee, young master!" said the woman angrily, "trifle not, or it will go ill with you. For my dear mistress's sake, I dare deceive as much as I can; but of those things which the stars declare by night, I may not speak falsely. And I am afraid, sore afraid."

"Afraid, good dame, why?" I asked, for I was in high good spirits at the way Mistress Varley had promised to help me, "why should you be afraid?"

"Because my lord Abbot loves me not, and because if I am in aught suspected, I may not help my dear mistress, and because I may be burnt as a witch, aye, and because

if I am, my poor Levi will be left helpless as a baby. But enough of that, young man. Tell me what you have done."

I saw the woman was much wrought upon, and I fancied the Spaniard had frightened her, so I told her of my good luck with Mistress Varley, and of the way she promised to help me.

"What o'clock is it?" she asked suddenly.

"It hath just struck nine," I made answer.

"There is time yet," she muttered, "there is time. Come with me young man."

"Where?" I asked.

"Ask no questions, but come. I am sore disturbed, for all things are confused. The cards be all awry, and the stars tell strange things. I would know more before you set out."

I followed the woman down some dark steps into a cellar, and then when the door was shut she lit a candle and revealed many strange objects.

"I may not trust to the glass," she said, "I must try the broth."

"What mean you, mother?"

"Ask no questions," she snarled.

"I have been trying to read, but I cannot, I cannot," she said; "what see you in the cauldron?"

She pointed to a large iron receptacle which was filled with a peculiar-looking liquid.

"Look steadily," she said, "thine eyes are young. and thy heart is not blackened. What is hidden from that Spaniard may be revealed to thee. Look, and tell me what you see."

"Nothing," I said, "nothing," and in spite of myself a fear gat hold of my heart. For let who will explain it, and I make no offer to do so, that cellar seemed filled with a kind of mysterious, dread power, the like of which I never felt before nor since.

"Look you, Dorcas Udy," I cried, "this is no devil's work, is it?"

"I be not a black witch," she replied, "I have not sold my soul to the devil. If I have knowledge it is not evil. Tell me what you see."

"Nothing," I repeated.

"Then I must stir the broth," she said, and seizing a curiously formed stick, she began to stir the liquid, chanting in a strange way all the time. The words were meaningless to me, but I will write them down so that any who read this may judge for themselves if they contained sense.

"Under the hazel bough, under the hazel tree,
To the degree of nine, from nine to eight,
From eight to seven, from seven to six,
From six to five, from five to four,
From four to three, from three to two,
From two to one, from one to none, to none,
To none, to none."

Then she used the Sacred Name, even while my blood turned cold.

'Look, look, and tell me what you see."

"Only circles, circles, circles," I answered.

"Look, look, and tell me," she continued. "Do you see a great house?"

"No."

"A man and woman riding alone?"

"No."

"But what? You see something."

"Two men," I said, and I spoke as I thought, like one who could not hold his peace.

"Both standing?"

"No one is lying down."

"Can you see the faces of either?"

"No, it's all indistinct, they scarcely look like men at all." and I vainly tried to lift my eyes from the crock. She waved her hand over the crock. "Look again!" she cried.

I looked and started back with a cry, for I saw what I hardly dare to write down, for fear that I may be called a knave.

"What do you see?" she asked.

"A great crowd," I cried, "a stake with faggots all around, and a maid, a maid dressed all in white fastened to it. And oh, my God my God, it looks like my love, my Faith! And look, oh! I see them going to light the fire, and— oh!——"

That was all, for a great darkness came upon everything, and I staggered, for my head was whirling as though I had been standing on a grinding millstone.

I felt Dorcas Udy dragging me up the narrow stairs, and after a few minutes my senses came back to me.

"What does it all mean?" I gasped.

The woman laughed, I thought strangely.

"It means that you must away from here," she cried, "the time is up."

"The horses?" I cried.

"They be in the right place. Levi will lead you to them."

"But were you fooling me?" I cried, for I could not drive the sight I had seen from my mind.

"Aye, I was fooling thee, I was trying thy metal."

"But tell me what——"

"No, I will tell nothing, I may not. There is nothing to tell, nothing at all. You must go. You must go."

"But let me see Mistress Faith first," I said, "let me hear from her lips what she wishes."

"I will take care of her, I will let no harm happen to my dear mistress," cried the woman, "aye, cursed be he who shall harm a hair of her head. I will see to that!"

Her tone was full of anger, and her eyes shone with a strange light.

"All is plain now," she went on. "You must leave here right quickly; you are the danger—you—you!"

I could not help obeying, for she seemed to cast a spell upon me.

I tightened my belt, therefore, and set my cap firmly upon my head, then I said to the woman, "If you betray Mistress Faith, then God have pity on you, for I will not. Tell her—tell her——"

"Go, go quickly! I fear, I fear!" said the woman. "Naught shall harm her. I would sell my soul for her safety. But you are the danger now. Go, go, and if you see the Spaniard, have no mercy, for he will not!"

The woman convinced me in spite of myself, and like one in a dream I went out into the night.

"This way!"

It was Levi Udy who spoke, and he led the way to a shed situate in a little dingle and hidden by trees.

A minute later I had led out two horses, which were ready saddled as if for a journey.

"Lead 'em up the lane," said the man, "'tis only half-a-mile to the queen's 'igh-road. Good luck, and trust to Dorcas, she is a wise woman."

I bade him good-night, and led the two horses towards the main road, my mind all the time being full of misgivings. After a few minutes, however, I felt better. The cold fresh air made me calm again, my blood ran warm and free. I reflected that in a few minutes I should be in the main road with a good horse under me, and that Leah Varley would help me to draw away all suspicions from Mistress Faith's whereabouts.

"After all, tis a good plan," I mused. "Dorcas will have deceived him, and he will see me ride away with Mistress Leah, while he will think it is——"

And that is all I remember, for at that moment I saw a thousand sparks flash before my eyes, and then all became dark.

CHAPTER XX

HOW I TRIUMPH THOUGH THE SPANIARD SUCCEEDS

WHEN I came to my senses I was in the kitchen of Dorcas Udy, in which were also three other men, one of whom was the Spaniard.

"Greetings to you, Master Richard Hamstead," he said blandly, showing his white teeth, and shrugging his narrow shoulders, greetings amico mio, as the Italians say. We be well met, although the hour is late."

I started up and felt for my sword, but it was gone. I looked around, and saw that the men had drawn theirs, and were waiting to pounce upon me if I moved.

"That skull of yours is thick, Master Hamstead, or you had not recovered so easily," went on Toledo, "so you may thank the saints. But perchance, had it not

been so thick you might not have been such a fool as to fancy you could deceive me by such a clumsy device. But it doth not matter now. You will be well cared for, and—no, if you please, dame Udy, we cannot bear to let you out of our sight."

"Not that it matters," he continued presently, "for every inch of the house is guarded, and I may not be fooled too often."

I listened like one dazed, but presently my brain began to grow clear, and I was able to piece things together. I saw that in some way I had been betrayed, and that now I was in the Spaniard's power. For myself I did not care so much, but a great dread was upon me lest he should also know that Mistress Faith was but a few yards away.

"Well, you have caught me, Master Spaniard," I said. "You have played the spy to good purpose, so now take me before Stephen Gardiner, and let's ha' done with the business."

"As for that, Master Hamstead, you will soon be where such as you should be; but there be many explanations to be made, eh! There is much to be done, and it must be done thoroughly. Besides, I must take under my care that dainty little English singing bird. You are but a clumsy lout, Master Hamstead, and she needs a Spanish gentleman to care for her," and he laughed again, showing his white teeth.

Had I had a sword I should have killed him there and then, although I knew that my deed would cause my burning; but I was helpless, and the Spaniard knew it. Still, the man feared me; I was sure of it, for he cringed like a coward as I started towards him, and bade the men bind my hands behind my back.

When this was done he began to strut around the kitchen playing with his jewelled sword-hilt, and singing snatches of his vile country's songs.

"Now that you are safe, Master Hamstead," he went on presently, "we will speak privately," whereupon he gave his men a look, and they left the room.

"Mother, Witch of Endor," he said, turning to Dorcas Udy, "bring hither the maid that I may tell her of my forgiveness."

"No," said the woman sullenly, "how can I when I know not where she be?"

The Spaniard laughed.

"My men be rough fellows," he said, "and I will not answer for their actions; but I tell thee, dame, if my commands be not obeyed, thou shalt appear before my lord Bishop at sunrise!"

Dorcas Udy laughed.

"You seem merry, Mother Witch."

"Aye, I be," responded Dorcas. "Take me to my lord Bishop you may, but what of you, Master Spaniard. If I be a witch, I'll not be a witch for naught. I have seen bigger men than you with rotting fingers and palsied hands. If I do not say the black charms, it is not because I do not know them, Master Toledo, and I warn you, they be black!"

The woman spoke in a hoarse voice, and in such a way that even I felt creepy. As for the Spaniard, he appeared mightily uncomfortable.

"I seek not to harm you, Mother Witch," he said slowly. "Neither do I dispute your powers. You have helped me in spite of yourself and through your skill I have learnt more than even you know. I honour you, too, for the love you bear the sweet maid. But I may not stop even if I would. My own good name is at stake, and if I fail now, I would not give even the throw of a dice for my future. I tell you, ere this my lord Bishop knows all, and he will not deal with you as I would."

"Liar! Coward!" I cried. "You would frighten a poor farmer's dame to do your bidding."

But the Spaniard paid me no heed. Instead he went on speaking as though I were not in the room.

"I tell you, Mother Udy," he continued, "I would not harm a hair of the fair lady's head; nay, I would willingly die to win a smile from her sweet lips. If she but come here now I may save her from a dark fate, aye, and I will too, by the Holy Virgin, I will."

"Liar!" I cried again passionately, "she hates you, she told me so."

At this he struck me on the mouth with his fist until

the blood came, and I, fast bound as I was, could do nothing.

"Coward!" I cried as soon as I was able to speak. Coward! Liar! She hates you, she hates you!"

At this the Spaniard looked at me steadily, then he shrugged his shoulders, and carefully wiped the hand with which he had struck me.

"I would I had called in one of my louts to have struck thee for thine insolence," he said, "and I ask forgiveness of my dead ancestors for having sullied my hand by striking the mouth of an ignorant clown. But, faugh, I may not wait. Mother Udy, let me tell you this. In two hours from now my lord Bishop's men will be here, and I tell you they will rase every stick of this house to the ground, and I shall be able to save neither you nor her. But if she comes now, I will save both. Nay, more, I will give her her heart's desire. I have power with my lord Bishop, and she shall be sheltered from all harm; as for you, I will speak well of you, and instead of being punished, you shall be rewarded."

I knew the man was speaking lies, I felt sure he was not certain of Mistress Faith's whereabouts, else he had acted differently. I doubted, moreover, that he had sent word to my lord Bishop, and I began to speak again, whereupon he seized a piece of rag which lay on the table, and with it nearly choked me.

"Silence, dog!" he said angrily, and then turned to the woman again, and spoke blandly as before.

"Bring her here, Mother Udy," he said, "and not a hair of her head shall suffer. Nay, more, if she will listen to the proposal I have to make, and which it will delight her heart to agree to, she shall become one of the great ladies of England, aye, I see a prospect before her that should dazzle her eyes, even although she were the daughter of the late King Henry."

I saw what was in his mind, but I could not speak, for in very truth, what with rage, fear, and the gag which he had stuffed in my mouth, I was well-nigh choked. Moreover, I saw to my dismay that Dorcas Udy seemed to be yielding to him. And in truth I scarcely wondered

at this for I could not see a loophole of hope anywhere. The woman, in spite of her fortune-telling gift, was but a simple country dame, and was no match for the Spaniard. She knew, too, that did he but tell Stephen Gardiner of the trade she carried on, he would make short work of her. And, besides all this, we were all completely in Toledo's power. His men surrounded the house, and although he might not be sure where Mistress Faith was, he would leave no stone unturned to find her.

"And if I do what you ask," said the woman, "what then?"

"You shall be rewarded, good dame, and not a hair of your head hurt. But if you do not, well, my lord Bishop may not be played with. Besides, I would save the fair lady. By the saints, I should die of a broken heart if she were led to the stake, as she will be if,— but why need I go over the ground again?"

"And Master Hamstead?" asked the dame.

"What matters for him?" said the Spaniard contemptuously. "Trust my lord Bishop to deal with the clown who hath tried to thwart his purposes. A Spanish gentleman troubleth not about swine!" and he shrugged his shoulders after his own peculiar fashion.

I saw then that I was naught to this dame, and that hitherto she had considered me only because she thought I could befriend the maid she had called mistress.

"I may not go against fate," she said presently. "Wait Master Spaniard, wait!"

"I may not," said Toledo, "if I accomplish not this alone, my power is gone. Decide quickly, mother witch."

The woman took two packs of cards from a drawer, and began to shuffle them eagerly.

"What's o'clock?" she asked.

"The Abbey clock strikes twelve," the Spaniard made answer.

"Aye, and the moon hath waned half," muttered the dame.

She spread the cards on the table, and began to mutter a charm. Then she picked up nine cards one by one.

"From nine to eight, from eight to seven, from seven

to six, from six to five, from five to four, from four to three, from three to two, from two to one, from one to none," she said slowly. Then she picked up the hundred and four cards, and shuffled them all up together again.

"Pick them out, pick them out," she said to the Spaniard. "Pick out two."

This the Spaniard did with a trembling hand and the woman snatched the two cards from him.

"What be they?" he asked.

"The knave of spades and the queen of hearts," she answered. "Surely it is fate, but I must look in the glass."

Upon this she took from a drawer a round piece of polished metal, so polished was it that it gleamed in the light of the candle.

"Breathe on it nine times," she snarled, and I saw that she was much wrought upon.

This the Spaniard did, and all the time she went on muttering words which had no meaning to me,

> The corncrake's craked,
> The dog hath howled,
> The owl hath hooted,
> The knight is booted,
> The moonbeams lengthen,
> The fate chain strengthen,
> The spirits gather round the lonely cot
> To tell what must be, and what must not,
> And the moon is on the wane."

This she said nine times, and then cried aloud to the Spaniard—

"Look! Look!" she snarled.

"Nothing, nothing," he made answer, and I saw the sweat stand upon his narrow forehead, and his voice was husky.

She made nine passes over the polished metal, and then both looked together.

"The stake again!" she cried, "the stake again! It is the warning of the spirits, and I must save her from that! I will bring her, I will bring her!"

"But you may not move from here!" he said.

"No, no!"

She opened a door, and then cried aloud three times, "Come! Come! Come!"

"Where comes she from?" said the Spaniard.

"How know I? Look on the glass and tell me what you see!"

"She comes, she comes!" cried Toledo, and I, sore, racked with pain as I was, wondered how much of witchcraft there was in the business, and how much fooling.

A minute later Mistress Faith came into the room, and then started back as she looked at Toledo's face.

She was habited like one ready for a journey, and I wondered what it meant; but wonderment gave way to anger as Toledo fell on his knees before her.

"Sweet maid!" he cried, "I come to save you from pain and death!"

"You, you!" she gasped.

"Yes, I. By night and by day you are in my mind. By night the thought of your eyes puts out moonlight and starlight; by day——"

"Have done with this," she cried angrily. "What doth it mean, Dorcas? Have you betrayed me?"

"Betrayed you, dear mistress," said the woman, "never. I would shed my heart's blood to save you. But fate is not for us, and I——"

"I tell you," said Mistress Faith, "if I had known that man were here, I would have died rather than have come."

Then Dorcas Udy gave the Spaniard a look which I could not understand, then afterwards, going up close to Faith, she hurriedly whispered to her. What she said I could not hear, and I was too much bewildered to make meaning of anything, for truly everything seemed more like play-acting than real life.

"Well, what would you?" said Mistress Faith presently, turning to the Spaniard.

"I would give you continual sunshine," he cried, bowing low, "I would strew your pathway with flowers. I would make your days glad with songs, and your nights a paradise with dreams of the saints."

"You would take me to Stephen Gardiner," said the

maid, and I saw that her eyes flinched not, neither did her voice tremble.

"But only to receive his blessing," cried Toledo. "Oh, fair lady, you know how I love you! I have told you so many times. And it is my love which makes me forget the angry words you have spoken to me, it is my love that compels me to save you from a terrible doom."

"What doom?" said the maid.

"Ah!" cried Toledo, "I would not speak of it. But you know that my lord Bishop is angry with heretics, and he hath gained the consent of your stupid Parliament to deal with them as he will."

I knew this was a lie, for Parliament had not yielded either to Queen Mary or to Gardiner; but I could not speak.

"But what of that?" continued the Spaniard. "If I take away my protection from you, then—ah, but that must not be. If you come before him as my wife, then my lord Bishop will rejoice, for he will know that the blessed Virgin will——"

"Your wife!" cried Mistress Faith, like one frightened.

"Aye, my wife! In the morning when the sun rises, we will go to St. Alban's Abbey, and a holy priest will administer the Sacrament of Marriage, and then, as my lady Toledo, wife of a Spanish gentleman, who is of the same blood as Ferdinand the great king, he will forget that the heretic maid, Mistress Faith Bedford, ever lived!"

For a minute Mistress Faith yielded to her fears, and she sobbed bitterly, but presently she lifted her head again, and her eyes were hard.

"But my consent hath to be gained, Master Spy," she said, "and I will not give it."

"Ah, I will forget that word, fair lady," he replied, "and methinks you will give your consent. For if you do not, you will burn even as Joan of Kent burned. Your body will burn, fair lady, and your soul will be dragged into hell. And I would save you from that. Ah, I I would, for I love you!"

At this my anger became too great to bear, and in spite of the gag that had been placed in my mouth, I cried

out in horror. Then Mistress Faith saw me, for I believe that up to this she thought I had forsaken her.

"Master Hamstead!" she cried, and then before the Spaniard could stay her hand, she pulled the gag from my mouth, so that I could speak again.

"Do not listen to him, Mistress Faith," I cried. "He tells you lies. Do not yield to him. Better die than fall into his hands."

"How came you here?" she gasped. "How came you to be in this man's power?"

But I did not answer her, for I saw that she had divined the truth even as she spoke.

"Have they harmed you?" she cried again, as she saw the blood upon my face. "Has this Spanish devil harmed you?"

At this, in spite of my suffering, my heart leapt for joy, for I saw a look in her eyes that filled me with a great hope.

"No, no, I suffer nothing," I cried, "but yield not to him. I—I tried to save you from him. Oh, he is a liar and a knave, listen not to him!"

At this the Spaniard, who had seemed to be stunned by Mistress Faith's action, strode towards me, with a riding whip in his hand. He lifted it to strike me again, but the maid caught it from him.

"Coward," she cried, "coward, to strike a man bound hand and foot.'

At this the Spaniard, who up to now spoke blandly, as was his wont, lost control of himself.

"Ah!" he cried, "I have not been warned in vain! You love him! You love him as he loves you. You cannot deny it, you love this farmer clown! But beware, mistress, a Spaniard can hate as well as love, and, by the saints, if you do but smile on him he shall suffer more than the vilest infidel suffered at the hands of the holy Torquemada! This I swear by all the saints!"

At this the maid hid her face like one ashamed, but she spoke not a word, whereupon my heart grew heavy again. Nevertheless, I could not help speaking out the love that was in my heart, in spite of the presence of the infuriated

Spaniard, and of the woman, Dorcas Udy, who sat like a woman dumb.

"Mistress Faith," I said, "heed him not. He is a liar, and hath the devil for his master. Nevertheless, he spoke the truth in one thing. I do love you, Mistress Faith, I do love you! Forgive me, but I cannot help it. I would have died to save you from this!"

All this I said stammeringly, and foolishly, too, I am afraid, for when I tried to put my heart's longings into words, I seemed powerless to tell what I felt. And this I have thought about since, I have wondered what I ought to have said, but even now I cannot think how I could have better told her of my love, although doubtless a cleverer man would have spoken differently.

All the same, I was glad I had spoken, for the maid lifted her head again, and I thought her eyes shone more brightly; but before she could utter a word the Spaniard again broke in, amd he spoke blandly as before.

"Ah, Mistress Faith," he said, "forgive my unconsidered words, but I could not help speaking them. I love you so that I am jealous even of this stupid hedgehog. As for what he hath said, forgive me that I could not save you from listening to that which must anger you. Truly, it is as if a drunken sot told of his love to the holy Virgin. Love! Faugh, such love as his must make you sick. And yet he hath been kind to you, and because of that I would be kind too. Accompany me to the Abbey Church at sunrise, and I swear even to brave my lord Bishop's anger for him. Aye, become my wife, and I will send him across to France in safety. All this will I do for love of you."

"And if not?" asked Mistress Faith.

"If not!" said the Spaniard. "Ah, ask me not that, fair lady, if not—ah, Spanish blood is impatient, and if you will not honour me, make my life a paradise—then well, he shall rot in deepest darkest dungeon in Fleet prison, aye, and he shall suffer the torments of the damned."

At this the maid's face grew deathly pale, and I knew that though she did not love me, she pitied me truly, so I cried out—

"Aye, and I would rather this a thousand times, Mistress Faith, ten thousand times, than that you should be pained by his presence. Anything but that. Mistress Faith!"

At this she looked at me like one distraught, as surely she must have been from all she had suffered. I thought she seemed about to speak, but before she could utter a word, the Spaniard caught her hand and tried to raise it to his lips. Then I saw how she loathed him, for she cried out like one in pain.

"How dare you!" she cried, "how dare you touch me!"

"I dare because I love you," he said, "aye, and I will make you love me, and obey me, too," he added, for he was no longer able to keep back his anger.

"Listen," cried the maid, "rather than wed you I would burn at the stake; rather than wed you I would become the veriest wretch that walks the street. Why, why, I would a thousand times rather wed one of my father's grooms than such as you. And now let me say something else," and the maid's words came pantingly as though she spoke with difficulty. "You speak scornfully of Master Hamstead, but you are not worthy to be the mat on which he wipes his boots, you are not worthy to——"

And this was all I heard, for passion overcame the Spaniard again, he struck me a heavy blow with his riding whip, after which he called in his men, and a few minutes later, in spite of all my struggles, I was on my way to London town, fast tied to a horse, and surrounded by a set of evil-looking villains.

CHAPTER XXI

I SEE STEPHEN GARDINER,—AND FLEET STREET PRISON

IT has been said by those who knew him well, that never after the accession of Edward VI., and he was thrown into prison, had Stephen Gardiner been seen to smile. Men had it that Bishop Bonner could laugh even when

he was condemning heretics to the stake, but that Gardiner, even when Queen Mary took him from prison and made him Lord Chancellor, was never known to betray merriment. That, however, is false. I say this boldly, for although I have been but a few times admitted into his presence, I have not only seen him smile, but I have heard him laugh aloud. When I have spoken of this to my friends they have shaken their heads like men in doubt, but had they been with me when I was dragged into his presence, the morning after the terrible night I spent in the house of Dorcas Udy, they would no longer stumble at my words.

Perchance my presence was calculated to raise mirth, for my clothes were torn and covered with mud, my hair was unkempt and bloody, while a great gash in my cheek caused by the Spaniard's riding-whip made my face hideous. Be that as it may, he laughed with great good-humour as he saw me.

"Ho, ho! Master Hamstead!" he said, "you seem to have had gay doings. You would appear to have been keeping late hours too, for, by my faith, you be a pretty sight." And then he laughed loudly like one who had witnessed a pleasing spectacle.

I made no answer. I could not, for my heart was like lead, and I saw no room for hope anywhere. In truth, I doubt whether any man could have kept his heart up, situated as I was. Mistress Faith was in the hands of the Spaniard; and this, as may be imagined, was enough to drive me crazy, for I knew now that the man was without honour or mercy, while I was powerless to help her. Concerning my own future I was well-nigh indifferent. If I could not help her whom I loved more than life, what was the use of life or liberty? I expected to be thrown into prison, and perchance gibbeted, but concerning that I was, as I said, but little troubled.

"You present not such a gay appearance as when I saw you first," he went on. "Well, I warned you. I am a good master to those who serve me faithfully, but I have no mercy upon those who oppose my will."

"I expect none," I answered.

"Ah!" he cried, bending his piercing eyes upon me, but which at the same time were almost hidden by his great bushy eyebrows, "that is your disposition, eh? Well, we will change that. What do you expect, young master?"

"The gibbet," I answered.

"But before that?"

"Maybe flogging, and imprisonment," I answered

"And you are prepared for it?"

"Aye," I replied sullenly, for a sort of desperate courage gat hold of me.

"Still," he said, watching me closely, "it will be hard for Richard Hamstead to hear the howls of a mob, while his own father stands by, and is ashamed of his only son."

The man stabbed me deep at the first round, but I stood my ground.

"Especially when he sent out his son with great hopes, on an honourable mission."

"Scarcely," I answered. "Had he known that his son was to be sent to do the work of a spy he would not have let him go. The Hamsteads love not stabbing in the back, and working in the dark like a ferret."

"Neither did I think they took one man's money to do the work of traitor."

"And they never have," I answered boldly. "Every groat you gave me hath been returned."

Upon this Stephen Gardiner gave me a look which, badly placed as I was, I could not help thinking of kindly.

"You did not treat me fairly, my lord Bishop," I went on rashly. "You took me for a knave, for a man who could betray those who had given him bread and board. I may be a fool, but I be not a Spaniard, nor a Jew, who can turn Judas at every corner."

"Judas!" he cried, "is not that what you have been? And who are you to choose your work? Is it not enough when your queen commands?"

"No," I answered boldly, "not while I remain a gentleman!"

He took two turns across the room, and then stopped before me.

"I am an old man, Richard Hamstead," he said almost kindly, "and I would not be hard on a hot-blooded youth. Perhaps you meant well, perhaps, perhaps——" and then he paused. "I would not like to see you hanged as a traitor," he went on, "your father would die of a broken heart."

At this a ray of hope came to me, but I did not know the man with whom I was dealing.

"But you have sorely disappointed me," he continued. "I hoped for great things. I said, here is a youth with a ready wit, an honest heart, and a trusty sword. I had intended you for high places, in my mind I had wedded you to a dame of high degree, and I had seen you among those who ruled the land. Instead—well, if you had been faithful, Godfrey Bedford might have been in my hands, and the whole of the Wyatt rebellion might have been nipped in the bud. Instead—but what of that? You know what I told you when first we met?"

"Aye, I remember."

"Well, what excuses have you to make?"

"None."

"None?"

"No, I would do the same again."

"Do what?"

"Try and save an innocent maid from imprisonment and death."

Again his keen eyes rested on me.

"Art thou a heretic?" he asked.

"No."

"Dost conform?"

"Aye, my lord," I answered.

At this I thought his face softened again.

"It would be a pity for you to die as a traitor," he said slowly, "but you must die, boy, you must die!"

"Then let me die as a gentleman," I cried.

"By the axe? No, Master Hamstead. The axe is reserved for greater than you."

"Then let me die by the sword."

"By the sword! Whose sword?"

"My lord Bishop," I said, a great hope stirring within

me, "report hath it that Toledo the Spaniard is the best sword in England."

"Aye, so report hath it!"

"Then let us fight, and let him kill me."

This I asked, for I determined that if such good fortune should befall me I would kill the Spaniard, and thus rid Mistress Faith of the man she feared and loathed.

For a few moments he was silent, then a grim smile overspread his face.

"Ah, I see, I see!" he said, like one thinking. "Love you the heretic's daughter?" he went on.

At this I was dumb, but I felt the hot blood rise to my face, whereupon he laughed in a cold cruel way.

"No, I may not grant that, Master Hamstead. I have heard that Senor Toledo fared not well when you fought before. And as he is a good servant, and hath served me faithfully, I have promised to wed him to Mistress Faith Bedford, that is after we have converted her to Holy Church."

And here the man mastered me, for I threw myself on my knees before him, and prayed him, with tears in my eyes, to save her from that.

"Ah! your pride is humbled at last, is it?" he said; "that is right. Well, your wish may be gratified, for if she refuse to be converted, then——" and he shrugged his shoulders as I had seen the Spaniard shrug his.

"Aye, and better the stake than she should wed that foreign devil. But have mercy, my lord Bishop, she is but a young maid, and she is innocent of all guile!"

He turned to me sharply.

"What would you do, Master Hamstead, to obtain my forgiveness, and forgiveness for this maid?" he asked.

I gave a start, for I knew not what his words purported.

"Aye," he went on, "what would you do? For mind, Master Hamstead, there be many at this moment rotting in foul dungeons for less wrong than you have done. And mind this, too, in but a little while, all heretics will be treated as they deserve, and this I swear. The faith of every man and woman in England shall be inquired into, and not one that will not conform shall escape the faggot

and the stake. Well now, you are the only son of your father, and he hath been my good friend for many years, and so I am disposed to be merciful. You have not asked for life, and it is well, for I love not cowards. Because of this I will give you a chance of life, aye, and of liberty, as well as, perchance, of honour."

I stared at him open-mouthed.

"Now listen!" he went on, "there is one man whom I have sworn to bring to England and to treat as he deserves. So far he hath escaped me. I know where he is, but because of the unrighteous condition of things which exists between England and France, I cannot touch him. Let me but get him to English soil and he is mine. Now then, do you go, bring him back here, and I will forgive you, aye, and I do not say but that I will make it easy for you to wed his puling maid, heretic though she be."

"You mean Godfrey Bedford?" I cried.

"Aye, I mean Godfrey Bedford. He will trust you, that I know. Well, go you to him, I will tell you where he resides. Use his daughter as a means to bring him to England, and then—well, I will forgive you, and—well, the maid hath been brought up in the house of Belial, and therefore she is a heretic; but she shall be converted, and mayhap, I may make it easy for her to become—but there, that is enough."

I opened my mouth to speak, but he stopped me. "Listen until I have finished, Master Hamstead," he said savagely, "if you do not this, then I lift not a finger for you nor the maid. Nay, I will sign the warrant for Richard Hamstead to be imprisoned and gibbeted, while the Spaniard may work his will with the maid."

For a minute or more my head was all of a whirl, and my sense seemed to leave me. I knew that Stephen Gardiner meant what he said, and the thought of liberty, of my father's smile, of favour with the Queen's Chancellor, and of Faith as my wife well-nigh took away my power to think. But only for a minute, for I saw what it all meant. To do his bidding I should have to go to Godfrey Bedford as a liar, I should have to use his daughter to decoy him to his death, I should never be able to look Faith

in the eyes again, for I should have sold my honour. No, no, better imprisonment, better death than that! But what of Faith? Oh God! it was a terrible struggle, for I called to mind the Spaniard's looks and the Spaniard's words! But I could not do the Chancellor's bidding, I could not be a knave, a liar, a spy, a poor crawling wretch that even the pot-house sots must despise, even for my own life, or to save Faith from—I knew not what. I was sorely tempted, but I could not. My life was dear to my father, but I was sure he would rather see me dead than that I should do this. Mistress Faith was dearer to me than life, but to use her as a means to bring about her father's death,—no! God help me, I could not.

"No, not that!" I gasped.

"Godfrey Bedford is a traitor to his country, and enemy to the Church and to God. It is your duty. I command you," cried the Chancellor harshly.

"No, I cannot, I dare not!" I gasped.

He gave me another of his swift, keen glances, and then without a word to me, he rang a bell. A minute later some men entered. To them he gave a piece of parchment, and then pointed to me. An hour later I was within the walls of Fleet prison, my heart cold, and aching with dumb despair.

For a week after I was thrust into Fleet prison, I could neither rest nor eat, for when tired nature yielded to sleep, evil dreams woke me, and when I would take food, the meat choked me. And this is not to be wondered at, for I was in great trouble. Did I but know that Mistress Faith was safe, I could have taken both sleep and food, but when I remembered that I had left her in the power of the Spaniard, I felt as though my senses were leaving me. All night long I fumed and raved as I tramped my cell, while during the day the sight of other prisoners made me mazed. At the end of a week, however, that happened which cheered me somewhat, and without which I verily believe I should have gone clean mad. For, be it known, that for that week I spoke to no man, save with cries of despair and madness, so that both keepers and prisoners were afraid to approach me. Moreover, the day on which

my sky seemed brightened, I received a message which made my lot harder to bear. This was nothing more nor less than a letter which a keeper brought me, and which I quickly perceived to have been written by the Spaniard.

The letter was short, but when I read it, I felt as though a red-hot iron pierced my head, and I cried out like a man in agony, as indeed I was. I was in my cell, I remember, when the keeper brought it to me, and I snatched at it eagerly, for I hoped that it might be a message from the maid I loved. This, however, was what I read.

"Senor Ferdinand Toledo is happy to tell Richard Hamstead that he hath caged the little bird called Faith Bedford, and all that Richard Hamstead feared hath come to pass."

At first I could not grasp the hellish meaning of the man's words, but when I did, I yelled out like a man possessed of devils.

"What is it, what is it, master?" cried the keeper.

"Get you gone, get you gone," I made answer, "get you gone, or I shall murder you!"

At that the fellow tore away like one demented, but not before he had hasped and bolted the door.

When he was gone I knew not what to do, for, in truth, I longed to kill myself, and get out of my misery. I reflected that I had been the cause of her trouble, and if I had acted less like a fool I had taken her to a place of safety. It is true I could not see what I could have done otherwise, nevertheless, the feeling was strong upon me that I had placed the maid in the Spaniard's power, and that as a consequence she was now the sport of one of the worst villians that ever walked the earth. I upbraided myself for taking her from Barcroft Hall, for seeking to take her to Dorcas Udy, and for trusting Mistress Varley. I called myself a fool for not killing the Spaniard when I had him at my mercy, I even repented seeking to help Faith at all.

What would have happened to me I know not, for I kept crying out like a Bedlamite, and calling for vengeance upon every one I could think of, save my father and Celia

and Mistress Faith. I even cursed the queen, and religion of all sorts, and prayed God in my agony that He would burn all the bishops with unquenchable fire. Presently, however, there was a knocking at the door, and I heard the keeper's voice saying—

"Peace, I pray you, master, here is a holy man come to you."

"Curse all holy men!" I cried, thinking of Stephen Gardiner and Bishop Bonner, through whom I had been as I thought brought to this pass.

"Nay, not so," said a voice, "swear not at all, my son, for it is evil. Be not so distraught, for God neither slumbers nor sleeps."

"God!" I cried, "what doth God care for me?"

"He careth for all, my son," said the voice, "and out of thy anguish He shall bring peace."

In spite of myself there was something in the voice that soothed me. For it was soft and kind and mellow, and betokened a gentle nature.

"Who be you?" I called out at length.

"I am a prisoner, even as you are," the man made answer, "I am placed within these walls because of my faith in the holy Gospel, but I shall regard my imprisonment as not in vain if I give you comfort."

"What would you?" I cried out.

"I would come in to you, and give you comfortable words, even those which God giveth me to speak," was the answer.

"Be you a friend of Stephen Gardiner?" I asked.

At this the keeper laughed aloud; but the man made answer, "Nay, it is through him that I am here."

Now this inclined me towards him, and a feeling of kindness towards him began to creep over me in spite of myself; besides as I said, the man's voice was kind and soothed me wonderfully.

"What is your name?" I asked.

"John Hooper," he made answer.

"A man of station?" I questioned, for even then I would have no low-born clown approach me.

"I trust I am a child of God," he replied; "as for my

station, at present I am a prisoner, but under the reign of Edward I was Bishop of Gloucester."

Upon this I bade him come in, for although he was not of my faith, I had heard him spoken of as a faithful shepherd, and as one given to great kindness, especially to the poor.

When he entered, I saw that he was about sixty years of age, but although well advanced in life he walked with a brisk step. His beard, which he wore long, was white. The hair on his head, moreover, hung in white locks down his shoulders.

He lifted his hands above his head, and then uttered a benediction in the English tongue, which, however, had a soothing effect upon me. Only a little light streamed through the window of my prison, but enough to reveal his kind-looking eyes, and gentle expression.

"My son," he said, "hath God dealt hardly with you?"

At this I broke down like the child I was, and laying my head upon his shoulder, I wept like a babe on its mother's bosom.

"I think you may leave us for a little while," he said to the keeper, and the man walked away muttering like one who dreamed strange dreams.

"What is it, my son?" he asked at length.

"I can hardly tell you, father," I said, "I am so overcome."

"Call me not father," he made answer, "it smacks of the old false Papal system."

At this my heart hardened somewhat, for I remembered that he was in prison for heresy, and that he was reported to be obstinate in his false beliefs. When I looked at his eyes again, however, I felt more kindly, for truly he looked a good man.

"And yet why not?" he went on, "I am an old man, and as far as years go, could have had a grandson as old as you. Call me father if you will, even as I call you son."

"I am sore distressed," I said.

"Aye, and that is plain. You need the comfort of the Holy Spirit, you need the peace of Christ."

At this I felt more than ever that his heresy had not kept him from being kind of heart, and so, when he had spoken many more kind and comforting words to me, I began to tell him my trouble. I had proceeded but a little way, however, when he stopped me.

"It will be well if you will tell me who you are," he said, "and who your father is? Perchance I may know more than you think the meaning of what hath befallen you. You need not fear interruption, for grace hath touched our keeper's heart, and he trusteth me fully. I trust he may continue to be my keeper."

At this, although I hardly knew why I trusted him so, I told him fully of my life at home, of my father's visit to London, of the way I was summoned before Stephen Gardiner, and of all that followed. It was a long story, and he often stopped me for explanations, the which I gave, feeling an ease at my heart all the time I spoke; in truth, it seemed as though in telling my story I was rolling a great burden from me.

"And that is all?" he said presently.

"That is all, my lord Bishop."

"Nay, call me not my lord Bishop, I am but a prisoner as you are. Call me Master Hooper, even as I call you Master Hamstead."

"I have many things to say to you," he went on presently, "and perhaps I can explain what may be dark to you, but before I do that I would bid you be of good cheer."

"Good cheer!" I cried, "how can there ever be good cheer for me again?"

"And that I will tell you, if you will but listen to me patiently," he replied slowly, and although I could see no ray of light anywhere, he seemed to me as a messenger sent from God.

CHAPTER XXII

MASTER HOOPER

"I WOULD say this first of all," he went on presently, "be not overmuch troubled concerning the message from the Spaniard."

"But think of what it saith," I cried.

"That is just what makes me hopeful," he replied. "It is the letter of a disappointed man who hath failed in his desire. Had he succeeded he would have used different words. It is because his heart is bitter that he hath said what he thought would give you greatest pain."

Now this, as may be imagined, comforted me much. I felt strongly the truth of his message, and felt that here was a man deeply learned in the heart of men. Still I wanted him to say more, and so I asked him for further reasons.

"I have seen this Spaniard," he went on, "and have watched his face. When I have been called before Gardiner and Bonner to answer for the faith in whose defence I am set, he hath been present. I know his kind well. Had he been successful in his designs, he would not have thought of wounding you; it is because he hateth you, and because the maid hath defied him, he is full of rage and bitterness, and hath determined in his wrath to hurt you all he is able."

At this I could have fallen on my knees in my thankfulness, for, in truth, I felt sure that he was right. Not that I ceased to have anxiety for Mistress Faith, for I knew Toledo would never give up trying to obtain his heart's desire, but I believed she had opposed him, and was, in spite of his evil thoughts, safe from his purposes, at least for the present. And so it came about through Master John Hooper that the very letter by which the Spaniard tried to wound me more deeply, did in reality give me much comfort.

But even this was not all the heretic Bishop of Gloucester

did for me, for no sooner had he cheered me in relation to the letter, than with many wise words he began, as I thought, to throw light upon things which I could not understand. Especially was he interested in what I had said about the monk of St. Paul's Cross, and he asked me many questions concerning him.

"Thought he well of Stephen Gardiner?" he asked.

"No, I think not," I answered.

"Seemed he to trust him?"

"No."

"Believe you that he favours the old faith, or did he speak of the reforms which the young King Edward desired to bring about?"

"Concerning that I know not," I answered. "He would tell me nothing of himself, neither did he desire to know aught concerning me. But he wished me well, of that I am sure, and but for him I had fallen earlier into the hands of the Spaniard. He is a man of God, too, of that I have full proof."

"As to that," said Master Hooper, with a sigh, "I much fear that he is still in the gall of bitterness, not having allowed the light of the Gospel to shine into his heart, but in spite of that, he is passing honest, and hath dared much for what he believeth to be the commands of Christ."

"Then you know him," I cried.

"Aye, I think I know him. His name is Edward Rogers, and for a time he was prior at the Abbey of St. Stephen in Hertfordshire."

"God save you, Master Hooper," I cried, "that explains much."

"Aye, and more," went on Master Hooper quietly, "he hath suffered much at the hands of Gardiner and Bonner because he will not curse his brother John, who at this moment lies in Newgate prison among thieves and murderers."

"John Rogers!" I cried, "he who preached against Papacy at St. Paul's Cross on the day when Queen Mary came to the Tower of London?"

"Aye, Master Hamstead, it is, methinks, the same man.

Nay, from your description I am sure it is he. He has not let the light shine into his heart, perchance, because he hath never fallen in company, like his brother, with William Tindal and Miles Coverdale, but he, nevertheless, loves his brother, and hath tried hard with Winchester and London, to have his lot made more pleasant. For this reason Stephen Gardiner hateth him, even while he hath it not in his power to condemn him to a like doom."

"And the woman?" I cried.

"She is his mother, and she, too, naturally cares for her son, although she conforms to the faith of Queen Mary. The two are constantly changing their home, that they may the better be able to foil Stephen Gardiner. There be, in truth, many things hard to understand concerning this same Edward Rogers. Some have it that he knoweth dangerous secrets concerning Stephen Gardiner, and for that reason he is not dealt harshly with; others have it, again, that he is a spy in Gardiner's pay, and knoweth many of his purposes."

Now, as may be imagined, this set me wondering greatly, and I tried to explain Rogers' interest in me in the light of this information. I remembered that my father had visited St. Stephen's Abbey often, and I had heard him speak of the Abbot as a holy man, whom the Abbot of St. Albans might well have taken as a pattern. But I had paid but little attention to these things, for, in truth, at the time my father had spoken of them I was too young to understand.

During the next month I saw much of Master Hooper, for, in truth, we were allowed much liberty in the prison, and as, so the warder told me, money was paid in order that I should be well treated, I had naught to complain of, either because of my food or my bed.

Once during my imprisonment Master Hooper was taken before my lords of Winchester and London, who tried, as I was told, to persuade him to give up his heresies, and to yield his allegiance to the Pope. He seemed much wrought upon on his return, and was more angry than I had ever seen him.

"I see dark days for England," he cried.

I was silent, for I knew not how to answer him.

"The time will come when this will be a land of mourning," he went on. "Gardiner will never give up trying until he hath persuaded Parliament to reconcile the country with Rome, and when that day comes woe be to us all. He will try and burn out true religion, we shall have fire and faggot all over the land, and those of us who hold fast to the Gospel of Christ will be burned."

"You burned, Master Hooper!" I cried.

"Aye, I shall be burned, my boy. Well, they shall find me ready. I have lived in defence of the truth, and I am ready to die for it."

This I took to be boasting, but I made no answer, for I liked not to hurt his feelings.

"You believe not, Master Hamstead, but you will see, you will see. God hath sustained others, and He will sustain me. This day both John Rogers and I have witnessed for the truth by the word of God, and I see Stephen Gardiner's plan. He will try and choke by smoke and flame the word of those who would witness for the truth."

"If he doth he will do a base thing," I cried, "a devilish thing," for I hated, and always shall hate the thought of making men suffer for their opinion, provided they live wholesome lives.

"Aye, but he will, both he and Bonner are thirsting for power, and they will get it, they will get it. Mary is hot in her hatred of the reformed faith, and now that the Spanish marriage is settled, God help us all! Philip is, as the other Spaniards, cruel as hell, while when he and Mary are wedded, and Reginald Pole comes back —aye, lad, pray God that you may be kept in prison rather than see the sights, which will make the world think of Torquemada."

"Nay, not so, Master Hooper," I urged, "be not so bitter."

"I be not bitter, Master Hamstead, I be not bitter, but I believed while Edward reigned that peace and true religion had come to abide. But now—lack-a-day, lack-a-day. But we will be ready. We shall be able

to do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us."

"But, Master Hooper," I cried, "my lord of Winchester cannot feel so bitterly towards you, if he did you would not be treated so kindly here. If he were your enemy, as you say, you would not be so well housed, so well fed, and so well treated."

At this Master Hooper laughed.

"You know not, you know not," he cried. "Why, I have paid like a baron for all I have had; but it hath come to an end now."

"What mean you?" I asked.

"I mean that Winchester hath ordered that I be thrown into a filthy dungeon, and that I be treated like a dog. I shall have but one night more in peace and comfort. But I may not fear, since God is with me."

I tried to persuade him against this, but when next day I was told that he had been cast into the common prison, and that he had to suffer all sorts of hardships, I began to be afraid, not only for him, but for myself. In truth, reports came to me which made me wonder how a man of God, which, in spite of all things, I had believed my lord of Winchester to be, could act so cruelly, neither could I understand why the Gospel of peace could be used for such ends, but I little dreamed then of what would happen before many months had passed away.

Now, as the summer days came on, I found my prison hard to bear, for being bereft of the company of Master John Hooper, I was lonely for want of some one to speak to, and the sun being much increased in power became like an oven. The stench of the rooms, too, was past description, and so it came about that I, who never knew what sickness meant, save at the time after I was wounded by the Spaniard's paid assassins, suffered much from nausea and general ill-health.

While in Fleet prison I heard occasional news about the outside world. The warder continued kind to me, and retailed gossip about the queen and the great Bishops, which interested me greatly. The queen, he told me, was sore distressed because of Philip of Spain's lack of love. She was burning of love for him, and although

wedded by proxy to him, he came not. She believed that her lords were in league against her, and tried to keep him from her, while she greatly longed to reconcile England with the Pope. Report had it, too, that she was religious beyond ordinary, and when Whitsuntide came she attended many ceremonies in order to turn away the anger of God which she believed to be kindled against her because of her father's and brother's heresies. She marched day after day in procession, with canopies and banners, and bishops in gilt slippers, around St. James's and St. Martin's, and Westminster. Sermons and masses alternated with religious feasts, and prayers for her father's soul. But the warder assured me that she looked very pale and wan through it all, appearing like a woman of fifty rather than as one just past thirty. Report had it, too, that warning pamphlets were sent to her, while others threatened terrible things, and these disturbed her sorely.

When July came, however, all her fears went to the wind, for Philip of Spain came, and they met at Winchester. The warder would have described this to me at length, for he had gossips who witnessed everything, but I was too vexed to listen. For by this time I longed more than words can say to be free, and the sight of prison and gaoler fretted me so, that I could scarce speak a civil word to any man.

Presently I heard, however, that the queen had her way, and that England, which had been excommunicated, was again reconciled to Rome, and that Cardinal Reginald Pole had come back to England amidst great rejoicings. So great were the rejoicings that I was allowed to watch the procession of king, queen, cardinal, and bishops on their way to St. Paul's, and this, as may be imagined, interested me much. It was now December, and the days had grown short and cold again, and heavy floods having fallen, much of the evil smells of the prison had been swept away. Fleet Street, I remember, was filled with a joyous crowd, while at Ludgate, such gay colours as I had never seen before were hoisted.

I saw Cardinal Pole, who was a man possessed of much

beauty, pass along ; a great cross was carried before him, and he blessed the people as he went. I saw Philip of Spain, too, whose appearance startled me much. I had thought of him as a man dark of skin, with black hair and eyes, which was common to the Spanish people. But he was a man fair of skin, having a great yellow beard, and blue eyes. His head, too, was covered with yellow locks, which made me think of the old Saxon kings. But his face had a heavy, sensual look, like one who loved much wine, neither did I think he could be a merciful man. For he looked gloomy and discontented, and heeded not the glad shouts of the people.

As for the queen, who was by his side, she was not fair of feature. She looked haggard and wan, in spite of the fact that the husband she had longed for was by her side. Report had it, too, that she should have been filled with great joy, for it had been given out that she hoped in a few months to become the mother of the future king of England. Still she looked not glad, nor hopeful, although she smiled in a sad way upon the people. I have heard since that all the time she was eating out her heart with sorrow, because the king responded not to her love, and repulsed even the caresses which she longed to give him.

Stephen Gardiner and Bonner, however, looked as though their hearts' desires had been accomplished. Bonner smiled benignly upon the people, and spoke, as I thought, gaily to Gardiner, who carried himself proudly and haughtily. I thought then, and I think still, that he was the most striking man in the procession, and he seemed to impress all with the fact that he was the real ruler of England.

I heard, too, that the bishops had all their old powers given to them, and that those reforms passed in the time of the great Henry, and of the boy Edward, had been annulled. And this set me thinking greatly of Master Hooper's words, aye, and brought to my mind what Stephen Gardiner had said to me. I greatly feared for Mistress Faith, of whom I had never ceased thinking, aye, and for many others upon whom Stephen Gardiner's anger might fall.

But the people seemed to think that all was well, for their enthusiasm knew no bounds. I was told that when Reginald Pole declared that all the curses, pains, and penalties which the Pope had declared concerning England were taken away, the whole concourse fell to sobbing with joy, every bell in the land rang out, and that but for a few heretics, which Gardiner determined to deal with to good purpose, all the nation became wild with jubilation. In truth, I was led but a little later to believe that the days of peace and joy had come, for on the eighteenth of January, in the year 1555, I was set free, and my father and Celia came to the prison to rejoice with me.

It was indeed sweet to breathe the air of liberty again, and weakened as I was by about ten months' imprisonment, I sobbed for very joy on my father's shoulder.

"Aye, but you look ill, my boy," said my father, "you be but a shadow of my son Dick."

At this Celia fell to crying too, so that after all my first day of freedom was not without its clouds.

"Have you heard aught of Mistress Faith?" I asked presently, for she was uppermost in my mind.

My father shook his head. "Say naught of her," he said presently.

"Why?" I asked.

"She is a heretic," was the reply, "and if it be known that you sympathize with her it will go hard with you."

"But I must speak," I cried, "and I must sympathize, even though I be sent back to prison again."

"Then wait until we be outside London town among the lanes, where no one may hear," he said.

We were all three of us riding towards home as he said this, and so I held my peace, hard as it was to do so; all the same, a hundred questions hung upon my lips.

"You know something, father," I said presently, "tell me, for I tell you I be nearly mad."

"Wait," he said, "the Queen's Chancellor is a great man, and a bishop of Holy Church, but——"

"But what?" I said, seeing him halt in his speech.

"Well, he hath sworn to root out heresy," replied my father. "Reconciliation with Rome hath given him the

power, and he hath set on foot a movement by which the faith of every man in England shall be inquired into. He hath suffered at the hands of heretics, and he hath determined that neither man, woman, nor child among them shall escape. Even if his brother be not faithful to Mother Church, he will burn, and no man who dares speak kindly of heretics will go free. I have been in sore trouble about you, lad, and have pleaded much so as you love me, put not your head in the lion's mouth again."

"But I love Mistress Faith, father," I cried, "and I shall go mad if I may not help her."

"As for helping her, Dick, it is—but there, wait until we get home, and when you have shaved that boy's beard, and dressed yourself in becoming attire, and eaten a good meal, I will tell you all I know; but I would you had asked no questions, for I can give you no comfort."

"Then tell me what you know," I cried; "make him, Celia, for I cannot bear longer. Remember, I have been ten months in prison, and no man hath told me a word concerning her."

At this Celia looked at him pleadingly, but he would speak no word until we were within the walls of the old home, and I had been able to eat and drink. Then when all was quiet he opened his heart, and told me what he knew, which, as you will soon see, only made me buckle on my sword again, and to go into the world with a great vengeance in my heart.

CHAPTER XXIII

MY RESOLVE TO KILL THE SPANIARD

"DICK," began my father, "I pray you be patient with me, as I tell what I know in my own way."

"Patient, father," I made answer, "put yourself in my place before you talk of patience."

"If I had been in your place, Dick, I trust I should not have taken up with the child of a traitor and a heretic;

aye, and one who is herself a heretic too. I did not train you for this, boy."

At this I rose angrily to my feet, for I was sore at heart, and I found it hard to bear even the shadow of a slighting word about Faith. I saw too that my father was becoming short of temper himself, or rather he seemed to me like one working himself into a passion in order that he might say what was in his mind.

"You say 'put yourself in my place,'" he went on, "but what about my place, Master Dick? Until a year ago, no stain of treason or heresy was ever hinted against our name, and it doth not please me that my only son hath been in Fleet prison for being faithless to the Queen's Chancellor."

I looked at him hard at this, for I thought he felt differently.

"Be it so," I said angrily; "if you feel that towards me, knowing what you do, better for me to go away for good, and then you will have no son to disgrace you."

"Silence!" he cried, "this is no fit language from boy to father; and this is poor reward for a father's love, that his son cares more about a minx than his father's honour, and his father's favour with the Queen."

"Minx!" I cried, "you be my father, or you should swallow that word; as it is, I will not stay to hear more."

At this I strode across the room, while Celia cried out in fear, but I had not reached the door when my father caught my arm.

"Stop, Dick," he said, "I recall the word. I believe she is a good maid, and a noble maid, although——" and then he stopped again.

"Although what, father? I tell you I be nearly mad, and I cannot bear more."

"Let me tell my story in my own way," he said more gently, "and be not foolish, boy. I tried to get to see you while in prison, but I could not—I could not, for Stephen Gardiner was angry that a puling boy like you should disobey him. In truth, thank me for your liberty. It is true that to-day forgiveness is given to all Wyatt's

rebels who are alive, but the Chancellor would not class you under that head. I tell you but for hard pleading you would have been kept there, until you had yourself sent an offer to the Chancellor that you would obey his behests. He was mightily angered that you did not do this, and daily hath expected word from you.

Now this surprised me much, for it had never once come into my mind to do this. Truly Stephen Gardiner was not so wise a man as I thought, if he believed, that in spite of the direst temptation, I could become a sneak and a liar. For much as I suffered in prison because of my fears about Faith, I should never have dared to look her in the face again, had I decoyed her father to his death.

"But all this doth not tell me what hath become of Mistress Faith," I said. "I left her in the power of the Spaniard, and no news have I received of her, save this," and I placed Toledo's letter in my father's hand.

"The Spanish devil!" cried my father between his set teeth as he read, and I saw that he pitied me.

"It is little I know of my mother," I said, "but what would you have felt had she been so placed?"

At this my father started up, and paced the room.

"But she is not betrothed to you," he said; "she cares naught for you."

"As to that I know not," I made answer, "but it makes no difference. I love her, and I shall know no rest until she be safe."

"Dick, think no more about her," said my father, like one pleading.

"Why?" I cried, frightened at the way he spoke.

"Because—because—well, she resisted the Spaniard, she defied him, spat in his face—and then he—well, he had her in his power."

"Well, what then?"

"Ask me not, Dick! Remember what a devil he is, remember how he sticks at nothing to gratify his passion, remember that she defied him and was in his power, remember too that she is a heretic, and the child of a traitor, and therefore hath forfeited all rights to——"

"No, father, not that! My God, not that!" I cried. "Do not say that this letter is true."

My father was silent, and I knew what he meant. I rose, and taking a sword that was hanging on the wall, buckled it on to my side.

"Where are you going?" asked both my father and Celia in the same breath.

"Can you ask, father?" I asked. I remember that a great calm came over me, and my brain was as clear as ever it had been in my life.

"But tell me."

"I am going to find Faith, and the Spaniard."

"But what is the use, Dick? What can the maid be to you now?"

"I know not," I said, "except that I shall never cease to love her. I know, too, that she is as pure as the saints, and I will find her—and him."

"Him! Toledo! Why?"

"To kill him," I said. "God would not have such as he live. He breathes poison everywhere, and I will kill him as surely as the sun rises to-morrow."

"No, Dick!" cried Celia.

"No, Dick!" cried my father.

"What would you do if you were I, father?" I asked, and after that he never spoke another word in opposition to me.

"But stay the night, Dick," said Celia, for the darkness had now come on, and the wind howled drearily through the trees around the house.

"No, not an hour," I said; "I shall know no rest until——" and there I stopped, for I knew not what to say.

"Dick," said my father, "you are sure you are a match for the Spaniard?"

"For ten of him," I said.

I know the words may seem boastful and foolish, but a great passion such as never comes to a man but once in life had fallen upon me, a passion which neither raves nor shrieks, but which makes the heart like a great hot stone. I had no fear, no pity for aught (save Faith). Weakened

as I must have been because of my long imprisonment, I felt as though my muscles were of steel. I was as calm, too, as though not a cloud was in the sky of my life, and I remember making my plans with a clear brain, plans which even now tell me how steady my nerves must have been.

"He is a clever swordsman," cried my father, "said to be the best in England, and he will never be taken in by the Cornish trick again!"

But this troubled me not one whit; I knew that even if his sword were in my body, I should grip him, and crush the life out of him.

"You will go to-night?" continued my father, and I saw that a great change had come over him.

"Yes, to-night," and even Celia ceased sobbing, and her eyes shone brightly.

"You've no money, Dick," said my father, going to a drawer, "and you will need some."

I made no answer save to tie a hunter's cap on my head. I was in no mood for gay attire, and it met my needs.

"You will need a horse, too," he went on, as he handed me a purse.

"Shall I?" I said, scarcely thinking of his words, for my mind was full of the plans I had formed.

"Aye, you will. Phœbe was brought here months ago —brought secretly. I found her fastened to the ring by the horse-block one morning."

"Ah!" I said, for I saw the hand of the monk of St. Paul's Cross in this.

"She is in the stable now, Dick—take her."

"Thank you, father," I said, and I saw then how I had mistaken him, saw that his angry words were but a cloak to cover his real feelings, and that he used them because of his love for me.

I kissed Celia tenderly, and then held out my hand to my father.

"Good-night, father," I said.

"Kiss me too, Dick," said he, and I kissed him, but my heart never wavered in its purpose, for I pictured

Faith as the plaything of a Spanish devil, and I felt that God had bidden me go forth and kill him.

"Be very careful, Dick," he said, "and trust him not one whit."

I laughed, for I felt strangely merry at the thought of my trusting the Spaniard.

"Be true to the old faith, my boy, and seek to be friends with my Lord Chancellor, if you can."

"Good-night, father," I said. "I will remember that I am your son. That will save me from doing aught unworthy."

With that I set out on my mission, and a few minutes later I was on Phœbe's back riding towards St. Albans. I determined to call on Dorcas Udy first of all, although I expected but little from her; after this I had another plan to carry out, which, the more I thought of it, seemed to promise great things.

Now strange, as it may seem, my heart was light as I rode towards St. Albans. My good mare trembled with very joy at feeling me on her back again, and I handled my sword-hilt lovingly, as though it had the feelings of a friend upon whom I might trust. But I suspect my lightness of heart rose from the fact that I was free, and that I was able to bestir myself again. I imagine, too, that youth hopes to the very last, and will ever try to paint the darkest facts in light colours. Anyhow I hoped for the best, in spite of all my father had said, for I knew that Mistress Faith was a maid of great resource, and I felt that the purity of her soul would form an impregnable barrier between her and such as the Spaniard. Added to all this, I felt sure I should find Toledo, and of the result of our meeting I doubted not a whit.

It was, as I said, the eighteenth of January when I was set free, and it was the eighteenth of January when I set out to find Faith and the Spaniard. The day had been cold and gloomy, and now the night had come on a black frost had set in, making the air keen and piercing. But this was nothing. Although confined ten months in prison, I had been well fed, and as during the last three months there had been much rain, the place had not been so

unhealthy. At any rate naught ailed me, and as by the goodness of my father I had been warmly clothed and well-mounted, I thought nothing of the biting frost.

In good time I reached the house where I had seen Dorcas Udy, and I went up and knocked loudly.

A great overgrown wench came to the door, and asked what I wanted.

"Dorcas Udy," I answered.

"She doth not live here now," said the wench, "she left just after the last lambing season, both she and her husband."

"Where went she?" I asked.

"I know not."

"Can you tell me of any one who can give me the necessary information?"

"No," said the wench; "but there be many stories about her. Some say the devil hath claimed her, others that she feared the Abbot, and hath gone to some place where no man knows her, and there be some who say that she hath turned herself into a hare, and runs among the fields."

Besides this I could get nothing out of her, much as I tried. It was made fully clear to me, however, that Dorcas Udy had left the neighbourhood, leaving no trace of her whereabouts behind. Concerning this I pondered much, but nothing came of it, so I mounted Phœbe again, and rode as hard as I was able to the house of Sir George Kenelm, for I desired speech with Mistress Leah Varley very much. Even on the night when I was taken from Dorcas Udy's house to London, I had strong suspicions as to the part Mistress Varley had taken in my capture, and on thinking about it during my lonely days in prison, I had been led to form many opinions. I reflected that she was in some way in league with Toledo, and that for purposes of her own she had betrayed me into his hands. I had often thought of my conversation with the hard-featured serving-woman who so longed for a lover, and I wondered whether Mistress Varley had told her who I was. I knew not how I should be received at the house

of Sir George Kenelm, but without ado I rode up and asked for Mistress Varley.

The serving-man eyed me rather strangely, I thought, for although it was not yet late, it was scarcely the time for paying calls.

"Will you tell Mistress Varley I wish to see her?" I said like one in haste.

"Mistress Varley?" he repeated.

"Aye; and as I am in haste, pray waste no time."

"Will your honour be pleased to give me your name?" he said, like one hesitating.

"Tell her, and tell her as privately as may be, that a gentleman from Barcroft Hall desireth speech with her on important affairs," I said; then, as if by sudden inspiration, I went on, "Tell her that I come concerning a person of foreign blood, in whom she hath interest."

"Can your honour wait?" he asked.

"How long?" I cried, for I was impatient at the words of the slow-speaking fellow.

"That I may not say," he replied. "She hath gone to church this night, and I know not exactly the hour she may return."

"To church!" I cried; "what church?"

"I think to Hemel Hemstead," he said.

"Are you sure?" I asked, for Helmel Hemstead was a good four miles away.

"Aye, I be sure," he said; "there be a priest there that she do put great store on. She goeth there once a week for confession."

The man acted like one who was afraid to speak with certainty, and I wondered whether Mistress Varley had in aught made a confidant of him. I knew that she was but a companion to Sir George Kenelm's daughter, and that if she ever had occasion to meet the Spaniard, as I felt sure she had, she might be glad of the help of this man.

"Is Sir George home?" I asked.

"Yes, your honour;" this he said seemingly without thinking.

"Then," said I, "I will see Sir George, and I can ask

him, as Mistress Varley hath gone to confession, to tell her on her return, what *I* meant to tell her."

"No, no," said the man eagerly, "no, no, that will not do. You can easily see Mistress Varley, sir. When I come to think of it, she told me she was going to St. Judy for confession to-night. Why, you may meet her, your honour, if you can go now—you'll meet her on the way from church. You can't miss her, sir. When you get to the park gates, you take the road to the left, and St. Judy Church is but half-a-mile on. You can't miss her, sir, you can't miss her."

"Is she alone?"

"Yes, your honour."

The man's manner had made me, as may be imagined, suspicious, so I hesitated a second, then I said quietly—

"Very well, then, I'll go to St. Judy, and if she be not on the road, or in the church, I will come back again, and have a talk with Sir George."

"Oh no, worshipful sir, that is, you can't miss her; and if she be not on the road, or in the church, then call at the priest's house, and——" then he stopped.

"I think Mistress Varley hath an understanding with this man," I said to myself as I made my way towards St. Judy Church; "besides, there is something which she desires to hide from Sir George."

I rode hard to the park gates, and turned Phœbe's head down the lane which led to the village church, when I saw a form coming along the lane. In spite of the darkness of the night I saw it was a woman, and in a moment I dismounted.

"Mistress Leah Varley," I said quietly.

I saw she had been weeping, and she scarcely lifted her head when I spoke.

"I am glad to see you," I went on. "I have ridden hard to be in time to meet you before you returned home."

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Richard Hamstead," I answered.

"Richard Hamstead out of prison!" This she said like one in great wonder.

"Aye, Mistress Varley," I replied bitterly. "You

helped to get me there, but you did not try to get me out. Still, you see I am here safe and sound, and I desire speech with you."

"I have nothing to tell you," she said.

"I think you have," I answered. "Anyhow I must know several things, and that right soon. If you will not tell me, I must go to the village priest yonder, and then, I dare say, Sir George will tell me why you go to confession so late at night."

"Tell me what you wish to know," she said quickly.

"I wish to know why you betrayed me to the Spaniard nearly a year ago?" I said; "aye, and I wish to know why you, who had received naught but kindness at the hands of Mistress Faith Bedford, should play her so falsely? These and other things must be told me, Mistress Varley."

The maid seemed to hesitate, like one in doubt.

"How do you know?" she said stammeringly, like one who hardly knew what she was saying.

"I know more than you think," I replied at a venture. "I have not met Stephen Gardiner for naught, neither doth a man spend ten months in Fleet prison without learning much."

"What would you do?" she asked.

"Do!" I cried, like the hot-headed fool I was, "do! You mean to the Spaniard?"

"Yes, to the Spaniard!" she cried, "if I tell you everything, will you kill him, Master Hamstead? because if you will promise this, I will tell you—that is, I will tell you everything."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MADNESS OF MISTRESS VARLEY

NOW, as may be well imagined, the words of Mistress Varley came to me as a great surprise. They set me wondering, and as if by a flash of light, I thought the maid's heart was revealed to me. There was passion,

disappointment, aye, hatred in her voice when she spoke of the Spaniard. She gripped my arm, too, like one much wrought upon, and I felt her hand tremble. As I said, I thought her behaviour laid her heart bare to me, for she was not one who ever showed much feeling. Even on the night when I fell into Toledo's power she spoke gravely, and thoughtfully, even as one who pondered much alone. Still I determined not to be over free of speech. I knew she had deceived and betrayed me once. and one is always shy of a dog who has once bitten him.

"Why should I kill him?" I said at length.

"Because he hath betrayed the woman you love," she said; "because he hath lured you to destruction that he might gain the woman he wanted; because he is a liar, a cheat, a knave."

Her words followed each other in wild succession, and her voice was hoarse. Never had I seen Mistress Varley in this mood before.

"Why did you not tell me to kill him when I saw you last?" I asked warily.

"Because, because——" then she stopped suddenly. "Oh, what can he see in her?" she went on; "what can you see in her? A poor, simpering thing as she is—why—why——" and she burst into sobbing passionately.

And this I did not understand at first, so I asked her who was the poor simpering thing that she scorned so much.

"Who?" she cried, "who? Surely you know, Richard Hamstead. He pretended to love me, and all the time he was longing for her. He courted her, and all the time he made out that he was courting me. He used me as a tool to get her for himself, and I, poor fool that I was, thought he only wanted me. That night—when I saw you last, I—I betrayed you, because—because he said if she were cast into prison Barcroft Hall would become his, and then he would be able to wed me. And I believed him, blind, mad fool that I was, I believed him!"

The woman was hysterical, and had seemingly lost all control over herself.

"But what hath become of her, of Mistress Faith?"

I said, because of a truth this was what I most wanted to know.

"Oh, I know not, I care not!" she cried. "I hope she is dead; nay, I trust she lives in misery. Why should she stand in my way, why should she steal his love? But for her I should have been happy. And she cares naught for him, she cares naught for any one. You, you, Richard Hamstead, are a fool—because——oh!" and then she fell to sobbing again, like one demented.

"When did you see him last?" I said presently, for the woman's passion had driven my plan of questioning from my mind.

"Seen him!" she said, "seen him! May he be cursed, cursed!" and then she burst into a fit of wild, uncontrollable laughter, which was worse to hear than her sobs.

"And to think that I was such a fool!" she went on a traitor to those who were kind to me. Master Bedford saw it all, and sent me here. He thought I could work no; harm here, but he did not know!"

The woman was not acting, of that I was sure, and unversed in the ways of a woman's heart as I was, I knew that now was the time to make her tell me all she knew concerning his whereabouts.

"Report hath it that he hath made many a woman his spy," I said; "such as he should die. But for him Mistress Faith would not have been hunted like a fox, neither should I have been thrown like a dog into——"

"You!" she interrupted scornfully, "what are you to trouble about? What matter what becomes of you, or her? But look you, Richard Hamstead, will you kill him!"

"Where is he?" I asked; "tell me where I may find him."

"Who knows?" she cried; "he failed with that poor thing that you love; in spite of all his boasting she outwitted him, and now—— But hath he failed? Is not that another ruse?"

She seemed like a madwoman communing with her own turbulent heart, all the same her words came to me like sunshine on a wintry day.

"Then you know not where Mistress Bedford is?" I said.

"I neither know nor care. What is she to me, or what are you? There is only him for me in this world, and now he hath sent that letter, saying—— O God, Master Hamstead, kill him! But no, not that, not that!"

Was the woman mad, or had the letter of which she had spoken driven her to uncontrollable grief? In truth, I who had no knowledge of women could not tell.

"Yes," she went on, "I did all for him, I betrayed you for him, I would do anything for him. I did not believe he cared for her, I thought it was all for me, and I hoped and hoped until to-night. But there must be some mistake. Will you find it out?"

"Yes," I said; "tell me where he lives, and I will find it out."

Then suddenly as if by magic a change passed over her. Mistress Leah Varley was no longer wild and passionate, but calm and composed.

"Am I not a fine play-actor?" she said presently.

"Aye, that you be," I made answer, trying all the time to understand her new mood.

"I thought I could play you a trick," she went on; "it was great fun," and she laughed like one tickled.

But this did not deceive me. There was mystery in it all, and I determined to fathom it.

"Fancy my making you believe that I knew aught of the Spaniard," she said; "I must be a good play-actor, mustn't I?"

"It is not your play-acting that makes me believe you know aught of the Spaniard," I answered; "it is something else. Ten months ago I asked you to help me, and you promised. You betrayed me to the Spaniard then, and that was not play-acting. I may have been a fool, but not such a fool as you think."

"How do you know I betrayed you?" she asked.

"Because I have ears, and eyes, and can count ten," I replied.

At this she was taken aback, and seemed at a loss for what to say.

"I never wrought you harm, Mistress Varley," I went on, "and I saw no reason why you should become the friend of mine enemy."

"Your enemy! Nay, I am not your enemy. Master Hamstead, be not a fool, and trust no longer in that poor thing. She is not worth the loving."

"Opinions differ," I said, hardening my heart to say the thing I hated. "Anyhow, the Spaniard declared that he would die to win a smile from her, and that compared with her all other women are but as nothing. To get her, Mistress Faith, he regarded you as but a tool, to be discarded the moment he gained his heart's desire."

I saw where the wound festered now, for she cried out again—

"Kill him, Master Hamstead, kill him! Aye, and kill her too. She can be naught to you now. He hath taken her to London. I have heard he hath lodged her near Westminster Abbey. He hangs around Whitehall as before, and if you see him, follow him to the place he goeth and kill them both."

"Is this true, Mistress Varley?" I asked.

"Aye, it is, it is!" she cried; "go now, go! Oh, I hate you, I hate you all!"

"Yes," I said grimly, "I will go."

"Stop," she cried, "I was only fooling you. He is not there. He is gone to Spain, and if you harm him, I will kill you,—I will, I will!"

I saw that the woman was torn with passion, and I scarcely knew what to believe, nevertheless I felt that she had let much truth leak out. I did not feel kindly towards her; in truth it was not likely that I should, but I pitied her all the same. She was in a sad plight, and she was, I knew, suffering under some great trouble.

"It does not matter much whether you kill me or no," I said. "Through you I have suffered worse than death already. But have a care, Mistress Varley. You walk on thin ice, and Sir George may not be fooled for ever. If I spoke but a word,—well——" And then I stopped, for it is often better to hint than to speak plainly.

"Aye, that would be just like you," she cried. "Tell

lies about an orphan girl, create suspicion about her, drive her from the only home she hath. Oh, that would be worthy of you, Richard Hamstead. But, but——" And then she stopped again, and looked wildly around her.

I was tired of being with her, and her mad ways made me impatient of her presence, so I turned towards Phœbe, and prepared to mount her.

"Where go you, Master Hamstead?" she cried, and I thought there was fear in her voice.

"To Spain to find the Spaniard," I replied.

"That is it," she said, "go to Spain. Go to Toledo, but before you go——" She hesitated like one trying to make up her mind to say a hard thing; and then without another word hurried away.

I felt vexed with her for leaving so, and I felt that I ought to have learnt more from her, but I did not move a step after her. She had angered me beyond words by playing so many parts, but I felt sure that if I kept her an hour she would tell me no more than I had already gathered by her strange behaviour, so I sprang on Phœbe's back, and rode slowly towards St. Albans, thinking of what had been said. I had not gone far, however, when a thought struck me, and I turned Phœbe's head and galloped to the house of the priest which stood close by St. Judy Church.

"Give you good-evening, father," I said, as in answer to the knock a priest opened the door; "forgive my late intrusion, but I am going on to London, and knowing you were a friend of the Lord Chancellor's trusted friend, Senor Toledo, I called to ask whether he hath changed his lodgings, or whether he still resides in his old quarters behind Westminster Abbey church?"

I know this was a clumsy way of finding out what I wished to know, but it was the best I could think of, and he being unsuspicious of me fell into the trap I had set.

"He is still at the same place," he said; "know you Senor Toledo?"

"I did up to a year ago," I made answer; "we were both in the service of my Lord Chancellor, but he desiring that I should go away from him for a time,—well, I have

seen naught of Senor Toledo. But I am returning to London now, and knowing you and he were friends, I thought you might save me trouble if I asked you whether you knew whether he had changed his quarters."

"He is still at the same place," replied the priest, "in Greyfriars Street behind the Abbey. I know, because I have lately heard from him."

"Ah, he is a gay fellow, the Spaniard," I said, still tempting my good luck, "and when we were together, I hardly ever knew what he would do next. What with love affairs and political affairs, his hands were ever full."

"Will you come in and rest awhile?" said the priest.

"Nay, I may not," I answered. "I have affairs of importance with my lord Bishop, and must hurry on. Have you seen Senor Toledo of late? If I remember truly he lately had a lady-love in these parts. What was her name? Ah, I remember! It was Mistress Varley. Is he still faithful to his love?"

At this the priest laughed uneasily. "I much fear the Senor will break many hearts before he dies," he said; "I do not think the Spaniards understand our ways. Know you Mistress Varley?"

"I think I have seen her once," I said; "she is little of body, is she not? Somewhat coy, and gentle of speech. A maid always tender, and always trustful. I did not think Toledo cared for such; but we may not account for tastes."

"Gentle of speech, always tender, always trustful!" cried the priest. "Look you, young master, you are a friend of Senor Toledo, are you not?"

"Scarcely a friend," I said, schooling my tongue, "but we have had much intercourse."

"Then tell him to be careful, for if he comes hither while she is in her present mood, he will be badly received. The letter he sent to her but yesternight hath—but I may not say more."

"Ah, I will tell him," I said, "I will tell him. I see he is at his old game. Surely a man of forty should be past such doings. Why, report hath it that he was in love with some heretic maid some time ago,—she was the

daughter of one of Wyatt's traitors. Know you aught of her ? "

" Speak not of her to Toledo, if you would retain his friendship," said the priest, " for concerning her he is sore mazed."

" Is he wedded to her ? " I asked, and I bit my tongue in speaking, for the very thought maddened me.

" No, no—that is, I know not what he is to her. The very mention of her name drives him crazy. I know naught of her."

On this I mounted my horse again, and rode towards London marvelling at my good luck.

It was so late when I reached London, however, that I knew I could do no good by trying to do anything that night, and when next day I tried to find Toledo, I found that I had set myself an impossible task. Whether the priest had intentionally deceived me or no I knew not, but certainly he did not live in Greyfriars Street, neither did I find any one there who knew aught of him. In truth I found myself in a quandary, for I dared not go to those who knew the Spaniard in order that I might ask questions concerning him, for although I was out of prison, I knew that Stephen Gardiner regarded me with no friendly eye. I felt that what I had to do must be done quietly and cunningly, and for this kind of work I was unfitted. Moreover, I found that nearly every man was afraid to speak aught that in any degree hinted at disagreement with my Lord Chancellor, for now having power to deal with heretics, he was greatly feared. Men remembered things which they had said in the time of Edward concerning the Church, the Pope, the mass, and other things appertaining thereto, and because of it feared for their lives. For that matter, I had returned to London but two days when all the city was moved because it went forth that my lord Bishops Gardiner and Bonner had determined to begin destroying heresy by bringing to book two notable offenders, namely Master John Rogers and Master John Hooper. It was also said that the Queen and Cardinal Pole had encouraged the two great Bishops to arrange for a visitation to be made throughout the country to

inquire into the faith of every man, woman, and child, and that all who had not complied with the forms of the Church before Easter day, or who, after compliance, "had returned to their vomit," were to be summarily dealt with by fire and faggot.

Now, no sooner did I hear that Master John Hooper, my late fellow-prisoner, was to be dealt with than my heart grew cold within me, although many declared that naught would come of it, and that both he and Master Rogers would plead for mercy when they saw the faggots. I dared not try and get near the court in St. Mary Overy's Church in Southwark where they were tried; all the same I was not surprised when I heard that both the heretics remained obdurate, and that both refused the Queen's mercy.

I heard presently that they were condemned to die, and that Master Rogers was to suffer at Smithfield. A great crowd of people made their way thither to see the heretic burned, and I heard them arguing as they went concerning the way Master Rogers would behave.

"He'll not stand the fire!" said one, "he hath no doctrine that will abide it. That be my lord Cardinal's opinion, also that of my lord of Winchester, and I agree with him."

Others thought differently, but no man dared to say much, for a great fear began to fall on the people. I was much tempted to go and see the great sight myself; but I did not. For one thing, I believed that Master Rogers would stand by his heresy, and I shuddered at the thought of seeing a man burned to death, and for another I was eagerly seeking, although vainly, to obtain news concerning Faith and the Spaniard.

As may be imagined, however, the ghastly business was the talk of the town, for when it really came off, strong men, as well as terror-stricken women, were overcome by the terrible sight.

"Saw you it?" said a man to me.

"Nay," I replied, "I went not thither. Saw you it?"

"Aye, that I did," he replied, "'and may God spare

me from seeing such another sight! I had not wept for ten years, yet I wept like a baby; I have always been faithful to the Church too, but when I saw how bravely Master Rogers stood the fire, and how boldly he declared for his faith all the time, I felt that he had a great doctrine to stand by him. Why, master, he was offered pardon before the fire was lighted, if he would but confess his errors, but he only smiled, and said that 'nothing should separate him from the love of Christ.'"

"Did he not cry out, nor nothing?" I asked.

"Nay, nothing. Some said, 'Ah, but he will yield when the sticks begin to get hot. He hath no faith, no doctrine.' But God 'a mercy, young sir, he just bathed his hands in the flames as if they were cold water, and presently raised his eyes to heaven and died. I tell you he made us all babies. We remembered how he had asked to see his wife before he suffered, and that Gardiner refused with a taunt, saying he had been living in adultery. This seemed hard seeing that the clergy were allowed to marry under King Edward; and the thought of his not being able to kiss his wife and children before he was burned made us pity him, as well as to wonder that his false beliefs could stand the flames. Some there were who said that neither Gardiner nor Bonner could stand so much, but they spoke only in a whisper."

"And Master Hooper!" I said, "he who was Bishop of Gloucester, what is to become of him?"

"He is to be taken to Gloucester to suffer there," said the man. "My lord Bishop of Winchester saith he shall suffer in the very city where he hath preached his detestable heretic lies; but I would not see him die, sir, no, not for a thousand golden angels."

Now, although I had always conformed to Mother Church, my heart went out to Master Hooper. I remembered his kind words to me, and his great desire to give me comfort in my trouble; and although I shuddered at the thought of his suffering, I much desired to see him at the last. But I reflected that I could not go. I believed that Toledo was in London, and I had made a vow never to cease seeking him until I had found him, that I would

never rest until we met face to face, that we might fight to the death.

As chance would have it, however, I heard two days later that Stephen Gardiner had sent some of his minions to Gloucester that they might witness either Master Hooper's recantation or his death, so that he might have a faithful report as to how he bore himself, and that the Spaniard was among those he had sent. Thus it came about that in my desire to find the Spaniard I was led to witness a sight which will never be swept from my memory, even if I live ten times the common age of man.

CHAPTER XXV

HOW MASTER JOHN HOOPER WENT TO HEAVEN IN A CHARIOT OF FIRE

IT was on the evening of the eighth day of February in the year 1555 when I reached Gloucester, after riding two weary days through miserable weather. I found the city all agog with excitement, because it had gone forth that the great heretic, Master John Hooper, late Bishop of the city, was to be burned in the morning. Every tavern and inn was full, because owing to the work Master Hooper had done in his diocese, people had come in from the whole country-side to say good-bye. For never, I suppose, had heretic become so beloved as this same Master Hooper. In truth I have been told that neither Master Ridley, nor Master Latimer, whose burning created such a stir in the land, was nearly so much beloved as Master John Hooper. It was hinted, moreover, that although no man dared to declare it aloud, there were many people converted to the reformed faith by his preaching, and that they loved him with a love beyond words. Others again had it that he was but a prating bigot, and that he would cry out for mercy when he saw the sticks. But in truth I asked but few questions

about him, for I came not so much to see him as to find the Spaniard. I went from tavern to tavern, and questioned every one I thought likely to know, whether they knew aught of this spy of my Lord Chancellor, but no man could tell me a word. This grieved me much, for I would not have ridden well-nigh two hundred miles but for the hope of having this man face to face. I do not think I am a vindictive man, neither did men say it of me, even when my blood was at the hottest, and when I loved a good and hotly-contested fight ; but I was scarcely master of myself when I thought of the Spaniard. His sinister face, his swaggering manner, and, above all, the cruel, devilish look in his black, ill-set eyes haunted me day and night. I knew that I had left Faith in his power, and that she had no man to befriend her. Moreover, it was nearly a year since I had last seen her, and my heart yearned and hungered for her more than words can tell. I pictured her in all sorts of terrible situations ; I fancied her on her knees pleading for mercy from Toledo, and again I saw her hurling defiance at him. And so because I knew his sensual nature, and was certain that he encouraged every depraved passion, I shuddered at her possible doom. Yet I knew that she was pure through everything, knew that although the worst came to the worst, her soul was as spotless as the snow.

Thus it came about that I went to bed that night with a mind full of uncertainty, but of resolution, and when I awoke early in the morning, my first thought was, "I shall see him to-day, and I will force the truth from him!"

No one was astir when I went downstairs ; even the kitchen wenches had not risen, so not being able to sit anywhere in comfort, I went out into the city in order to see if aught interested me. But it seemed like a city of the dead, and I wondered much if Master Hooper were asleep, and whether he had aught to comfort him through that terrible night.

When I got to the open space outside Gloucester College, I saw that a number of people had gathered, and that they had evidently come from afar.

"We be in good time," said one yokel ; "I've walked

good seven mile, and I was up at four this morning so as to miss naught."

"So was I," said another. "I know of nothing why they should burn him, for he was a good man, but I said, 'If there's to be a burnin', I must be there.'"

"Aye," said another, "and this is the place, under this great elm-tree. Aye, but I don't believe it'll come off. He'll show the white feather, and we shall have had our journey for naught."

"Surely not," said another; "well, if we do, I'll get as drunk as a lord. I've three groats, and I'll spend 'em all. A man must have some pleasure."

"It be a terrible shame," said another; "God help us all if such as Master Hooper be burned. I would save him if I could, for he hath been the making of me. Years ago I was a bad man, an adulterer and a fornicator, but he led me to a new path."

"That's nothing," said another, "that's nothing, Mark Dreardon; the fellow hath spouted heresy, and left the Church. Not that I understand it, but Queen Mary saith that King Edward was ruining the country, and she must save it. Not that there's much like saving to be seen yet. But we shall soon be all good Catholics, I reckon, for those who are not will fizzle. So saith Father Berry to me only yesterday. So have a care, Mark Dreardon. But it's cold waiting, and I wish they would make haste. We shall have a grand sight from here."

"What time is the torch to be lighted?"

"Nine o'clock."

"Aye, and it wants only half-past seven yet."

I left them (for truly their words made me sick), and made my way back to the tavern again. By this time the servant-maids were stirring, and the ostlers were in the stable, so after seeing that Phœbe was well fed and groomed, I made my way back to my bedroom. I had nearly half-an-hour to wait for breakfast, so I set to work with my sword, cleaning it, and sharpening it so, that it shone like a mirror, and so sharp was it that a boy with a soft beard might have used it as a razor.

"You shall taste this before the day is out, Master

Spaniard," I said grimly, as I thrust it in the sheath, and made my way to the room where I could get a bit of breakfast.

Although I little wanted to see the burning, I went towards the College Green with the rest of the crowd, for in truth I felt drawn thither as by a spell. I had a sort of feeling that the Spaniard was near me, a tingling sensation was constantly creeping down my back, and I constantly found my hand playing with the hilt of my sword.

By the time I got to the College, a great crowd had gathered. Some were laughing as if in high good-humour, some seemed cold and uncomfortable, while many looked around with a sad and haunting expression in their eyes, as though their hearts were filled with wonder that a good man should have to be burned because of his opinions.

"He preached on the very spot where the faggots are put," cried one, pointing to a pile of green wood, on which the rain was falling. "It was there he spouted his heretical doctrines, let us see if those same doctrines will stand by him now."

This the man said with a laugh, but I saw that many looked darkly on him, as though they had but little sympathy. In truth, after a while a great solemn hush came upon us all, and even those who had talked loudest presently became quiet, for such scenes as this were not yet common in England.

Presently I looked towards the College gates, and saw in a room over it, that a number of priests had gathered. On the faces of these, too, were different expressions; some of them laughed and talked gaily, but others looked sad and thoughtful.

Presently, being tall, and thus able to look over the heads of others, I saw the mayor, and aldermen and sheriffs, coming towards the faggots with Master Hooper in their midst, and when he came near I do not think there was one in the great crowd but felt a lump rise in his throat, and the tears well into his eyes; for much as we hated heresy, we pitied the poor heretic. Not that he moaned or complained; nay rather, he came towards us smiling,

as one who expected something joyful rather than a terrible death. I saw, however, that he limped, and had to lean somewhat on his stick, and this was not to be wondered at, for he had told me that he had sciatica very badly in the prison, which he caught there owing to the damp cold cell in which he was placed.

As he came closer I heard him speak plainly.

"Alas!" he said, "why be all these people gathered here, and speech is forbidden me? But do not fear, I will cheerfully obey. If I do amiss in anything, hold up your finger, for I am not come here as one forced or compelled to die. I might have had my life, as it is well known, with worldly gain, if I would have accounted my doctrine falsehood and heresy."

At this there was a great sob among the crowd, and some said in subdued tones, "God bless you, Master Hooper!" whereupon he smiled kindly, and like one whose heart was full of affection. I think he would have spoken, for he opened his mouth like one in the act of speech, but a warder stopped him instantly, whereupon he bent his head with a sigh.

Now, being strong, and tall, I had forced my way to the front of the crowd, so that I was quite near when he came up to the spot where the stake was driven in the ground. I wished even then that I was away from it all, but I could not move, for my eyes seemed chained to the man who was about to suffer, so that I could no more go away than I could fly. Moreover, there was something in Master Hooper's presence which caused a great hush to fall upon us all. Not that he was a man of striking appearance. Nay, rather he was little and somewhat bent, and his body was thin and weak. Nevertheless there was not a man but who fixed his eyes on him, and almost held his breath. His thin white hair hung over his neck, while his beard was also long and white.

"Oh that I could speak to these people!" he murmured. "Oh that I could tell them of the great salvation through faith in a loving Saviour," but he said nothing further, only let his eyes rest upon us in a pitying and compassionate way.

Presently I saw that he recognized me, and he smiled like one who met an old friend.

"Ah, Master Hamstead, you have come to see me mount in a chariot of fire!" he said. "Well, I am ready; may God bless you, and lead you to the truth, my son!"

"Silence!" cried the warder.

"I pray you to forgive me," he said; "I did but speak to a youth who was in prison with me."

At that moment the rain fell heavily, and the wind blew loudly, but Master Hooper heeded it not; instead he knelt down by the stake and began to pray. As he prayed a man brought a box to him.

"Master Hooper," he said, "in this box is your pardon if you will recant your errors."

"Away with it!" cried he, "away with it!"

Then my Lord Chandos, who was in authority and was close by, spoke aloud—

"Despatch him, then, seeing there is no remedy," he said.

After this Master Hooper was undressed even to his shirt, and I saw him shiver in the cold. But he murmured not. Then a man tied a pound of gunpowder between his legs, and as much more under each arm, after which he was fastened with an iron hoop to the stake.

"God help him!" sobbed a woman close by me.

"Amen!" I could not help saying.

At that Master Hooper smiled on me, and then helped with his own hands to arrange the faggots around him. Some dry straw was placed around his feet, but I noticed that the faggots were green and wet.

"It will never burn!" said a yeoman who stood by me.

After this a man came bearing some fire, which kindled the straw, but after terribly scorching the sufferer, the wind blew it out, without catching the sticks on fire. Then more faggots were brought and lighted, and this time Master Hooper's face was singed and scorched, but again the flames went out, leaving only hot damp sticks smouldering around his legs.

I saw the poor sufferer wipe his eyes with his hands, and I knew that he was in agony.

"For the love of God, good people, let me have more

fire," he said, and as he spoke my mouth grew hot and parched, for the sight maddened me.

After this I could not for some time bear to watch. I was told that they brought a third supply of wood, and laid it about him, and that this time the powder exploded, but either it had been ill-placed or was not enough.

"Is he dead, is he dead?" I said with closed eyes to the yeoman who was by my side.

"No, young master, not yet," was the reply, "but the fires are getting hold of him now."

I longed to cry out, I longed to hurl a curse at those who could bring such a man as Master Hooper to suffer the torture of grinning devils; but I could not. Presently I opened my eyes again, however, and I saw what will remain in my memory as long as I have a heart to feel, or a brain to think. I saw Master Hooper's face scorched and blackened; I saw the green damp wood slowly burning while the smoke rose slowly, sometimes blown hither and thither by the wind, sometimes ascending straight upwards, and through the smoke I saw Master Hooper beating his breast with his hands, and his lips moving. Then above the hissing of the damp burning sticks, and the roar of the wind I heard him speak—

"Lord Jesu, have mercy upon me!" he exclaimed. "Lord Jesu, receive my spirit!" and these were his last words on earth, although some say he lived for nearly an hour afterwards in direst torment.

Presently his head dropped, and I heard one of his gaolers say, "He is dead."

Then a priest who was close by said—

"Aye, but he lives in hell!"

At this the crowd, who had been sobbing bitterly, broke forth like men in anger.

"This," said the priest, "is for the glory of God, and the good of the Church."

Upon this the yeoman who was standing by me yelled out like mad—

"Curse the Church!" he cried; "curse the Church that can only advance its ends by such deeds! Such as this could only be born in hell!"

At this I expected that many would fall on him and cast him into the fire; in truth my own anger rose at his blaspheming words; but not a man of us touched him. Perhaps, true to the Catholic faith as we were, the burning had unmanned us, and made us wonder how such deeds could be done in the name of Him who took little children in His arms and blessed them.

In truth I never in all my life saw people so wrought upon.

"Aye," I heard them say, "but can it be that such as he is gone to hell? May God grant that I go to the same place."

"His doctrines stood the fire," said another; "many said that they would not."

Indeed I soon saw that the burning of Master John Hooper, instead of driving men from his heresy, was leading them to embrace it, and that large numbers who held to the old faith were led to doubt it that morning.

"The thing cannot be good if it leads to deeds like this!" I heard men mutter, "and yet I hear that many more are to suffer in the same way. It is said that one Master Rowland Taylor is burning in Suffolk, and another in Coventry this very day."

And so tongues wagged, while I spake not a word. I was so stunned with what I saw, that I could scarce think at all, but presently I was roused to life, and thought, and after that a new set of passions mastered me.

It came about in this wise. It happened that while they were talking around me, I looked towards the room over the College gates where I had seen some priests, and my heart gave a great leap as I saw the face of the Spaniard. I surmised that he had been watching the scene in order that he might carry back a correct account to the king and queen, as well as to Cardinal Reginald Pole and Stephen Gardiner. Anyhow, without waiting a second, or thinking of any plan of action, I hurried through the now scattered crowd with a great fire in my heart. As luck would have it, too, I had seen him at a fortunate time, for he was at that moment leaving the men amongst whom he had been standing. By the time I got to the

College gates, therefore, he had reached the College yard, and was walking towards the street.

I followed him for some little way, and then my heart rejoiced within me, for I saw that he walked towards the country. Then I bethought me that I had heard the previous evening that some of the queen's retainers stayed at the house of Sir Anthony Kingston, who lived a little way out of Gloucester, and in an easterly direction.

"It is two miles to Sir Anthony's house," I said to myself, "and the crowd will not leave the town for hours yet. He will come to a lonely spot presently, and then I will speak to him."

For as yet he had not seen me, and in truth there were so many people in the roads that I could walk unnoticed.

I soon saw that my surmise was correct, and so I followed him, my heart beating all the time with joy, for I had no more fear of what the result of our fight would be than if he had been a child of six years old. As soon, therefore, as I saw him leap over a stile and was walking along a foot-path which led to a large house in the distance, I ran up to him.

"Stop, Master Spaniard!" I said, and upon this he turned round sharply.

"You!" he cried as he saw me.

"Yes," I said, "I must crave a little of your time."

"I cannot give it you," he said; "I am on important business, and I may not be hindered by such as you."

"But you must stop for all that," I said firmly. "I have come a long way to find you, and now I have found you alone, you must hear what I have to say, and tell me what I wish to know."

Now whether there was aught in my face, or in the tone of my voice which made him serious I know not; this I know, the Spaniard changed colour, and looked mightily uncomfortable. Doubtless he saw that I was in no mood to be trifled with, for young as I was I knew that my features were set and determined, and that if the eyes of a man who has a great purpose tell anything, mine did that morning. For there is a difference in the anger of men. The anger of the man who shouts, and

raves, and calls names is of but little account, but when it is quiet and grave—well, some one has a bill to pay. And in truth I felt little like shouting or raving; ever since I had left my father's house, I felt as though I could never laugh or use a light word again, but all the same my heart burnt hot. Although brain and nerve were cool, I know that my lips were set, that my eye burned steady, while my voice was that of a man who may not be put off easily.

The Spaniard recovered himself in a minute, however, and although I am sure he felt little like it, he tried to laugh.

"You look solemn, Master Hamstead," he said, "and you speak as though you would like to rouse me to anger. But it may not be; a Spaniard nobleman may not treat a clown like you as an equal."

"You may not, because you cannot," I replied. "I be no nobleman, but I have the blood of an English gentleman in my veins, which is better than that of any Spaniard; but enough of that. Before I change that grin on your face, there are two or three things you must tell me. One is this: where is Mistress Faith Bedford?"

He hesitated a second, looking furtively at me all the time, then he said with a sneer—

"I have honoured her by giving her my loving company for near twelve months, and she hath honoured me by laughing at you, even while caressing me."

"Is she your wife, Master Toledo?" I asked sternly.

Upon this he gave an answer, which I will not write down, but which caused me to lift my right hand and knock him down as I would knock down a stable-boy who was insolent.

While I stood above him I drew my sword.

"You must die for those words, Master Spaniard," I said quietly and slowly. "They are lies, and they are blasphemy, but I will not kill you as you deserve. You shall die in fair fight, so guard!"

At this he rose to his feet, and drew his sword, and I knew by the devilish look on his face that he would use every means in his power, whether fair or foul, to kill me!

CHAPTER XXVI

HOW I HELD THE SPANIARD AT MY MERCY

HE looked at me a second without placing himself in a posture of defence, and then he cast his eyes quickly around.

"I may not kill you here," he said presently, "carrion by a footpath is not pleasant, neither do I wish it possible that any one shall know that I have condescended to fight with you. There is a wood yonder."

"I follow," I said, but I did not sheath my sword.

By the time we had gone fifty paces, the Spaniard had recovered his coolness, and with it his swaggering gait. He even went so far as to whistle gaily, although I knew this was intended to hide the feelings which really possessed him. I watched him closely all the time, however, because I knew he would, if chance permitted, use any means in his power to strike an unfair blow. Presently we arrived at the little wood, and though the trees grew thickly, they did not hide the light because it was winter, and there were no leaves. Moreover, we found an open space between some holly bushes, which hid us from the sight of any one who might be walking near.

"Now, Master Hamstead," he said, "I will stop that foul mouth of yours, and make it impossible for you to trouble gentlemen again. It is cursed weather," he went on, "but one must expect such in this vile country. All the same, I must not soil my clothes; I shall have to pay court to my pretty Faith presently, and I would only appear before her as a gay lover ought."

With that he began to divest himself of some of his gay attire, and I knowing how much clothing may disadvantage one in fighting, followed his example, but watched him narrowly nevertheless.

When he was ready, he made his sword whistle around his head in his swaggering way, and then kicked away two or three rotten sticks which lay on the ground.

"Before I send you to your ancestors, Master Hamstead," he said, "I am willing to oblige you in aught possible. You said you wished to ask several questions, but have only asked one."

"They were all contained in that," I said grimly.

"And that I have answered," he said with an ugly look on his face. "But she hath a bad temper. Had you been more humble I might have taken the trouble to let you know where she resides, for in truth I am nearly tired of her. English maids be of too coarse a fibre to please a Spanish gentleman for any length of time. In truth I feel like telling you now, only it would be of no service to you, for in three minutes from now you will follow the worthy Bishop who hath gone to hell, and whose departure thither we saw only a little while ago. But stay," and then he shrugged his shoulders and laughed; "as you are no longer in my way, if you humbly beg my pardon for your insolence, and promise never to interfere with a Spanish gentleman again, well, I will simply content myself with giving you a flesh wound, just as a mild chastisement, and then tell you where she is, so that when you recover you can go to her and relieve me of my burden."

"Guard!" I said sternly, for I could bear his words no longer.

"Willingly," he said, coming towards me with his horrible smile, "and perhaps after all I had better kill you."

A few moments later we were fighting a life and death battle, without a thought of mercy in either of our hearts.

Little time had passed, however, before I saw that the Spaniard resorted not to the tricks he used when I had met him before, but he used others so cunningly, that I had great difficulty in frustrating them. Time after time he pressed me hard, time after time I thought he had mastered me, but I was in no mood to be easily beaten. In spite of his protestations, I felt sure that he had not told me the truth about Faith, and I determined to live and still be her protector; but more than that, I knew him to be her great enemy, and I swore in my heart that he should never live to cast his ugly sinful eyes on her again. So I stood my ground firmly, fighting grimly, while all the time a

calm rested on me, a calm that even now I shudder at.

In point of skill and agility the Spaniard was my master. He had learned tricks in Spain that I wot not of; all the same my father had not taught me sword-craft for naught; and so because my nerves were steady and my hand strong I held him at bay. Besides, God was surely with me that day, as He is with every man who tries to live as a man should.

And this the Spaniard saw presently, saw it with dismay. He had neither the bone nor the muscle that I had, and he had weakened himself with wine and loose living, nor could his cunning tricks make up for his lack of strength.

Presently he changed his method, and gave me, as I thought, chances which a few minutes earlier he was careful to keep from me; but these I was not in a hurry to take, for I knew my man. I was fighting for Faith, fighting to rid the world of a grinning fiend. And here my caution saved me for a time, for I perceived that his seeming carelessness was only a ruse of a clever swordsman. He soon saw this, and then with a sinful leer in his eyes he began to tempt me. He said words about Faith which caused the fires to burn in me, until I lost much of my control; and then thinking I saw my advantage, I made a lunge at him which he had planned for and expected. But he did not succeed in his design fully, for I did not stumble as much as he had expected, while on the other hand I had the good fortune to knock his sword from his hand. All the same I did stumble, and badly, and although he could not run me through the body, as I saw he had planned to do, he had me at advantage, for he leapt upon me, and before I could recover my balance, he had coiled himself around me like a serpent coils itself around its prey. Besides, although I had taken off my outer garments, I still wore my jerkin which was fastened around my throat with a band. But for my stumble I would not have minded this, but nearly helpless as I was, I could not prevent him getting his hands inside the band, by which means he held me at his mercy, crushing my neck so that no breath could come.

I felt my head swimming, while my eyes were being pressed out of their sockets, and I thought I was lost.

"I'll do the wrestling trick this time, Master Hamstead," I heard him pant, and there was sound in his voice which told me that he was sure of victory. But I did not give up, for though he had coiled his legs around mine and fastened his hands on my throat, I knew I was the stronger man, so I gave a great heave which broke the neck-band as though it were a bit of straw, and then having caught a little breath, I felt my own man again. Nevertheless, I fell to the ground, the Spaniard upon me and still holding me fast. Presently I got my hands free, and after a mighty struggle I got hold of the Spaniard's throat. He wore nothing around his neck, but he being thin, I did not mind, for I was able to grip him like a vice, and then the fight was at an end. His limbs hung limp, and getting uppermost, I held him as he had held me, until I saw his face growing black. It was no maiden's hands that I had put upon him, neither was the business child's play, and this he felt, for his now wide staring eyes were full of terror.

"Mercy!"

I heard the word gurgle from him and in spite of myself I loosened my grip.

"Mercy!" he repeated again.

"Did you have mercy on Faith?" I said grimly, for death was in my heart.

"I know nothing of her!" he gasped. "I have never seen her since that night—at—the—the witch's house."

"Your letter to me while I was in prison?" I cried.

"Lies!"

"The words you spoke but a few minutes ago?"

"Lies! I was mad with passion, with jealousy, and I wanted to—to—oh God, don't hurt me so!"

And this he said because I had now put my knee on his chest, and held his thin neck in my hands. Nevertheless I gave him enough breath to speak.

"Tell me more!" I said grimly.

"There is no more," he said faintly; "she escaped from me the moment you left the house, and I have never seen her since."

"You are a liar!" I said.

"I swear it, I swear it!" he gasped; "by the blessed

cross I swear it, by saints and angels I swear it, by the holy Virgin I swear it!"

"But you spread the report that she was with you."

"I know! I did it because I have sworn I would never be outwitted by a woman, and because I hated her for scorning me, and—and——"

"What?"

"I hated you!"

The man convinced me in spite of myself. The tone of his voice, the look in his bloodshot eyes which still looked as though they were starting out of his head convinced me. And yet convinced as I was, and here I know I seem to be contradicting myself, I could not believe him.

"Then you know nothing of her?"

"No!"

"Nor of Dorcas Udy?'

"No!"

At this my passion began to die away and with it my desire to kill the man. For it is easy to kill in hot passion when your enemy is fighting you, but when he lies helpless at your feet it is different. Still, I was in no mood to be trifled with, and I know he felt it.

"Mercy, Master Hamstead!" he gasped again, and I knew that I had squeezed his courage out of him.

"Look 'ee, you lying cur," I said, "I believe not so easily, but it is sore work to kill one who will whine like a whipped spaniel; all the same, if you have told me lies in this case, I will make you suffer more than that heretic Bishop suffered but an hour ago, aye, and you shall die, though Gardiner himself be at your back."

"I have not lied! I have not lied!" he cried, hope coming into his eyes.

"You be a Catholic," I said.

"Yes."

"Then listen," I said sternly, "and repeat the words I am going to speak, after me. Are you ready?"

"Yes. Anything!"

"I, Ferdinand Toledo, swear that I have never seen Mistress Faith Bedford since the hour that Richard Hamstead was taken to London a prisoner, nearly a year ago."

He repeated this word for word.

"I swear that I have never harmed Mistress Faith Bedford by word or deed, save by those means of which Richard Hamstead knows."

Again he repeated my words.

"I swear that I know not where she is now."

This also he said, while his eyes darted venom at me.

"And I pray that God will burn me for ever in hell-fire if what I have sworn is false."

This I said firmly, and with angry pleasure in my heart, and I listened for him to speak. But the fellow hesitated at this, like one afraid to speak such terrible words, until I put a little more pressure on his throat, and then he spluttered them out, glaring angrily at me with his evil eyes all the time.

"Now let me go," he said.

"Not yet, Master Spaniard," I answered, "there is something else," and then I went on again.

"I swear by God and all the holy angels that I will never seek to harm Mistress Bedford again—say that."

He said it.

"Neither will I seek to make her my wife."

"No," he cried, "I will not swear that. I love her. I love her more than such swine as you can think of."

"Swear it."

"No, I'll die first; I'll suffer everlasting fires first. She is the queen of my life, and I will never cease trying to win her for my wife! Curse you, you bloodthirsty bully!"

What I should have done, I know not, for while anger was hot within me, my heart was light because of what the fellow had sworn; besides, now that I knew that he had not harmed her, and knew nothing of her, I did not so much fear for her. I repeat, therefore, that what I should have done by him, I knew not, but at that moment I heard a sound of voices.

"He must be near by," I heard some one say; "the varlet said he went towards the wood with another man."

"But with whom would he have gone, Sir Anthony?"

"I know not; but all these Spaniards have cunning ways. I'll shout! Hullo, Toledo!"

I saw the look in the Spaniard's eyes, saw how he tried to answer back, and still I hesitated. In a second the situation was plain to me, and I knew that unless I despatched the affair quickly, I should be in danger. I knew it would be safest to slit the fellow's throat, and thus end his career of lies and deceit for ever, but I could not do it. Since then I have wished that I had, but I could not bring myself to soil my sword with his blood in such a way. It would seem like murder, and not death in hot fight.

"Kingston! Sir Anthony!" cried the Spaniard, for in my hesitation I had somewhat loosed my hands from around his throat.

"Silence, you hound!" I cried, gripping him more tightly.

"Curse you!" he gurgled, "I will be even with you yet. Kingston! Sir Anthony!"

This the fellow said by a superhuman effort, and he began to wriggle mightily.

"I will have her, for all you say," he gasped. "You dare not kill me."

And this angered me so that I got up, and lifted him bodily from the ground; then I shook him, as I have shaken a wet garment which I have taken off after a day's ride in the rain, so that he had not a breath in his body, and after that I threw him on the ground, where he lay limp, but breathing.

I spoke not another word to him, and so stunned was he by the fall that he did not move while I put on my coat. As I turned to leave him I saw his sword lying, and this I took with me as a memento of our fight, and it hangs on the wall of my dining-hall at this moment. Concerning this sword many questions have been asked me, aye, and large sums of money have been offered me for it. It isa valuable blade made of the finest steel, while its hilt is much bejewelled. But I have never used it, nor have I ever been tempted to sell it, for I could not think of selling the sword of a man I had beaten in fight, neither would I ever use a weapon that had been soiled by such a hand as that of the Spaniard.

But again I feel that I am straying away from the track

of my story, and this I must not do, for I have much to tell, even though I be not skilled in the telling.

I made my way back to the city of Gloucester by a round-about course, and by taking great care I was able to keep out of the sight of those who sought the Spaniard, and an hour later I was riding to London at all the speed of which Phœbe was capable.

Now my reasons for returning to London so soon may be quickly told. On my way back to the inn, after fighting with the Spaniard, I bethought me of what I should do next, with much diligence. I felt sure that the Spaniard had told the truth about Mistress Faith, and yet I wanted to find her more than words can tell. My heart yearned for her, and I longed to feel the touch of her hands, and to hear the sound of her voice. I knew, too, that now England was reconciled to Rome, Stephen Gardiner would hunt out and burn all unrepentant heretics, even as he had burnt Master John Hooper that very morning. Moreover, he had spies everywhere, and hating Master Bedford as he did, he would spare no pains to find his child, and bring her to punishment.

The question with me therefore was, how to find her, and if I could, take her over to France. I reflected that since January the eighteenth, the ports would not be so securely guarded, seeing that the Wyatt rebels had all been forgiven, and so I might by good luck, if once I could find her, take her to her father. But, as I said, the question was how could I find her, and then all of a sudden I thought of the monk of St. Paul's Cross. I bethought me that perchance Mistress Faith might seek his aid, and if so, I might find him, and set my heart to rest. And even if this were not so, I remembered how Master John Hooper had told me, that he was closely acquainted with many things I might wish to know.

It was with the determination of finding this monk, who, Master Hooper told me, was called Edward Rogers, that I hurried to London with all speed. I hoped, too, that Phœbe's fleetness of foot and powers of endurance would take me to London even before the queen's messengers could get there, and in this I hoped with reason, for on

news concerning Master Hooper's death was known even at Whitehall when I rode through the city.

Having taken Phœbe to a small hostelry which I had never visited before, I made my way to St. Paul's Cross, in the hope of finding the monk. I found on talking with people on the way that the city was all agog with excitement, as it had gone forth that some score or two of heretics had been arrested, and that London would soon be ablaze with faggots for the burning of those who obstinately refused, as the Churchmen put it, "to leave their vomit, and return to the bosom of Mother Church." In this, however, there was much foolish talk, for I soon discovered that it was Stephen Gardiner's plan first of all to make example of those in high places, such as Master Ridley and Latimer, and possibly the great Archbishop of Canterbury.

When I reached the house in the little street near St. Paul's Cross, I found that it was occupied by strangers. These people, they told me, knew nothing of those who had lived there before them, and, although I made many roundabout inquiries of other people who lived in the same street, they ended in nothing.

I reflected that I must act quickly, for I knew that should the Spaniard, on his return to London, find out that I was in the city, he would encompass sea and land to revenge himself on me. Once I thought of returning to my home, but even that might be placing not only myself but my father in danger, so I determined to go into the church and think out the matter at my leisure.

This I did, and fortune favoured the plan, for I had not been there more than ten minutes before I felt a hand placed upon my shoulder.

"Master Richard Hamstead," said a voice.

I turned and saw the monk.

"I desire to speak with you," I said.

"I know it," said the monk. "Go at once to Aldersgate, and wait until I come,"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MONK'S ADVICE

IN less than half-an-hour the monk came to me at Aldersgate. He looked, I thought, very pale and anxious, and he had a habit of giving furtive glances around him like one afraid. He spoke no word to me as he came up, but led the way through several narrow streets until we came to a modest dwelling, where, without giving any sign of his presence, he entered.

"Are you hungry, Richard Hamstead?" he said as soon as we were alone.

"No."

"That is well. Now tell me where you have been, and what you have done since last we met."

I hesitated, for I knew not how to begin.

"I know something," he went on. "I know that the Spaniard outwitted you, when you were in the cottage beyond St. Albans. By going to the maid Mistress Varley you played into his hands. By some means Toledo hath obtained great mastery over her, as over many others. I verily believe she would sell her soul for him. Time after time she hath declared she would never speak to him again, and time after time hath she yielded to his wiles.

"How know you Mistress Varley?" I asked.

"That I may not tell," he said, "but enough that I know. You were taken before Stephen Gardiner, who offered you a chance of forgiveness, but you refused. You were in prison for nearly a year, and you were set free on the eighteenth of January. So much I know."

"You be well informed, Master Monk," I said, "so that I have but little to tell."

"You have much to tell. You have been to Gloucester. Tell me what happened there."

Whereupon I told him what I have written down, giving details of the death of Master John Hooper, also of my fight with the Spaniard. But he paid little heed to the

fate of Toledo, so great was his interest in the Bishop.

"And men said he would not stand the fire," he said, like one musing.

"But he did stand it," I cried, "even as your brother John Rogers stood it days before."

"Ah, know you who I am?" he cried, looking at me keenly.

"As much as I may know," I made answer, "but truly you be a mystery to me."

"I am a mystery to myself, Richard Hamstead," said the monk, "but tell me, are you true to the old faith?"

"I know not," I made answer. "I never had doubts till I met Master John Hooper in prison, and even when there, his arguments scarcely affected me one jot. But when I thought of the reasons for which he was cast among common felons, and now when I think of the cause of his burning, I have some doubts. If religion cannot be advanced but by such means, then we are better without it."

"You are a fool, Richard Hamstead," said the monk testily. "You distinguish not between the truth and the abuse of it."

"Mayhap you are right, Master Monk; I am no schoolman, and am not versed in matters theological. But I am no hot-gospeller, and yet I thought what Master Hooper said was very beautiful. And surely, too, that faith which caused your brother to brave the fire, aye, even to bathe his hands in it as though it were cold water, must be very great and very holy."

The monk was silent.

"But I would not speak of that now, Master Monk," I went on; "in truth, I am not able, for it is beyond me; besides, there is that in my heart which troubles me more. You remember what I told you about my fight with the Spaniard, and what he said about Mistress Faith Bedford. I came to you to ask if you know aught of her?"

He hesitated before speaking, and I thought I saw his lips twitch.

"You love this heretic maid," he said presently.

"Aye, father, that I do."

"And yet you were trained in the true faith, and she is

an enemy to the Church, and a child of an arch-enemy."

"She is an enemy to naught good," I cried; "she is as pure as the angels of God."

The monk smiled.

"She would harm no man," I went on; "even when I held the Spaniard, her greatest enemy, at my mercy, and when I would have killed him as he deserved, it was she who cried out for me to spare him."

"But she believes not the Catholic doctrines."

"I know not as to that," I replied; "this I know, I must find her, and I must protect her, if I may."

"You protect her!" and he smiled bitterly.

"Aye, that I will, with my life," I said hotly. "If you know where she is, tell me that I may find her."

"If I told you, I should only surround her with danger. No, Master Richard Hamstead, you may not know where she is."

"But, you know?"

"Aye, I know?"

"Is she in safety?"

"Aye, as safe as a lamb amidst howling wolves *can* be safe."

"Thank God," I said fervently; "but how know you, Master Monk? How came you to know so many things?"

"How?" he laughed bitterly.

"Aye," I went on, "tell me this. Tell me too why you interested yourself in me; tell me how you know of me and of my plans; tell me why you warned me that night when we first met? I cannot understand it all. I know you be John Rogers' brother, and that while he accepted the reformed faith you remained true to the old; but how you acquaint yourself with men's thoughts, and plans, and motives is a mystery. Tell me, Master Monk!"

"You be but a prating boy," he said presently.

"I never betrayed any man's secret," I cried, "but in truth I be in sore trouble, and I know not whom to trust. My heart is racked for Mistress Faith, for although I would believe your words, you be such a mystery to me, that my mind refuses to be restful."

He looked at me steadily like one who would read my innermost thoughts, and then he said slowly, "Aye, I will tell him. It will be good to ease my heart."

"Aye, tell me," I cried eagerly.

"But remember this," he said, "if you betray me, you will but cast me into such fires as burnt John Hooper and my brother John."

"You be a heretic then!" I said aghast.

"Nay, not so," he said hastily, "not so. But in these days a man is not allowed to think, he is scarce allowed to breathe. On every hand is treason, hatred, revenge. On every hand, too as was in the case of Spain, men who have a grudge against his neighbour breathes heresy against him, and then he becomes a suspect of my lord Bishop and his minions. Gardiner is as bitter as Satan himself towards those who threw him into prison, while Bonner longs for blood and slaughter. I verily believe that he will be nicknamed 'Bloody Bonner,' so much doth he yearn for murderous deeds."

"But they do these things for the good of religion?" I urged.

The monk smiled.

"Aye, aye," he said, "but they make honest men fear for their lives, they place an embargo upon truth. Therefore when I tell you who and what I am, I may be kindling the faggots which shall burn me."

"Then tell me nothing," I said. "I believe you to be an honest man. You have told me that Mistress Faith is safe, and I believe you."

"Safe!" he cried, "no one is safe concerning whom a breath of heresy hath been whispered; but at present neither Gardiner nor his minions know of her whereabouts. I know they are trying to find her; but while she is wise and silent she will remain unmolested."

"But why can I not see her?" I asked, "she must be lonely, and sad. I would make her feel that she is not unthought of."

"Because your movements will be watched, Master Hamstead. Because if you knew where she was, and went to see her, Stephen Gardiner and the Spaniard would know

too, and then God have mercy upon her. No, leave her in quietness. It is best so."

I saw the force of what he said, and yet my heart hungered for a sight of Faith's face. I wanted to hear with my own ears the assurance that she was well and happy. Besides, in spite of what the monk said, he was a mystery to me, and my faith was sorely tried.

"You do not speak like a Catholic," I said.

"Aye, but I am, Richard Hamstead, and I am a true Catholic. Just like Savonarola, the great Italian priest, I love the Church like my own life, but I love not persecution and slaughter. I love not the thought of excommunication and death, because of differences in matters of opinion. I would that the Church should be purified of wrong, but not by such means."

After this he was silent for some time, and seemed to be thinking deeply. Presently he turned upon me sharply, and said—

"You be not safe in London, Richard Hamstead."

At this I laughed like a fool, for I suppose that my freedom from prison, and my victory over the Spaniard had caused me well-nigh to lose my head.

"A fool laughs at danger, but a wise man prepares himself for it," said the monk.

"True," I replied, feeling the truth of his rebuke, "but I am fair witless, Master Monk. I know not what to do, neither what to think, for what you say of Mistress Faith Bedford makes me mazed. She may be in danger, and yet I know not where she is that I may help her. Besides, I cannot make you out."

"Aye," he replied, "and I promised to tell you something about myself. But I dare not at this time, Richard Hamstead, I dare not. You be but a hot-brained boy after all."

At this I spoke not, feeling angry. For a man will confess concerning himself, what, if another mentions rouses him to madness.

"Some time I may tell you," he went on, "but not now. You say you love the maid, Richard Hamstead, if so you should desire to serve her."

At this I started up impatiently, for I knew not what was in his mind.

"Aye, you should desire to serve her," he continued; "you should desire to serve those she loves. And at this moment her father must be eating out his heart in France wondering what hath become of his child."

"And what then?" I asked impatiently.

"A man can now go to France without much danger. Since the Wyatt prisoners have been forgiven, the ports have not been guarded so narrowly."

"What is that to me?" I asked.

"It affects you in two ways," he replied, "and yet you may not think so. A lover's love is selfish, for he remembers only himself. If ever you should be wedded and have children, my son, you will know what I mean. For surely if you love the maid, you should desire to relieve her father's mind, and tell him that she is safe. That is one way in which it affects you; the other strikes more closely. Think you that Stephen Gardiner hath forgiven your disobedience?"

"I believe he hath," I replied. "He is a great man, and will not carry a paltry revenge in his heart."

The monk laughed.

"You know not Stephen Gardiner," he said; "he never forgets, and never forgives. Why, boy, but for your father, and—another, you would have been dead ere this."

"Who is the other?" I asked.

"I may not tell you, Richard Hamstead, but remember this, Stephen Gardiner stoops at low game if it suits his purpose; besides, think you, you have done with the Spaniard?"

"Aye," I replied loftily, "he will be afraid to meet me again."

"Afraid! You are a fool, boy, a fool! I would stake my life that at this moment he hath a plan all cut and dried concerning you. Why think! he hates the thought of you, and by now he will have poured such a story in Gardiner's ears as will have made him determine to hale you to the faggot."

"The faggot!" I cried.

"Aye, why not? Think you the Spaniard will ever forgive you for making him take that oath? Think you his mind is not torn with passion? Why even now he will have got witnesses to prove that you sympathized with John Hooper, and that you tried to save him from the stake."

"He dare not," I replied weakly.

"Dare not! Ride to Dover or to Deal this very night, my son, and take the first opportunity of putting the sea betwixt yourself and England. By this means you will kill two birds with one stone; you will be able to tell Master Bedford of his child's safety, and you will save yourself from the Spaniard's revenge."

"I hate running away," I answered; "besides, where is Master Godfrey Bedford? France is a big country, and I know not the lingo that they speak."

"He is at Rouen," he replied, "a town in that part of the country called Normandy. He lives not far from the great cathedral there. Search him out, search him out."

"How do you know he is at Rouen?" I asked; "how come you to be acquainted with the doings of those who, plotted against the queen?"

"Ask no questions!" he cried angrily, "but do as I warn you, for I speak no light words. I have said enough, now go."

At this I rose, for there was a tone of authority in his voice which I could not resist; besides, I felt sure that although I knew nothing of him, he spoke not without reason.

"You will go to France," he said.

"Aye, I will go!"

"And when you get to Rouen, find the cathedral. When there ask for Maison Rouge. It means Red House, and when you have found it ask for Master Tom Killigrew."

"Master Killigrew!" I cried, "why, I know him."

"All the more reason that you should find him."

On this I went away, with my head all dazed, for in truth the monk was a greater mystery than ever.

"I must think this out," I said presently, "for I like not the course of things."

So when I got back to the tavern, I called to mind all the monk had said, and the more I remembered the more was I at a loss what to do. For in truth my own danger troubled me not one whit, neither did I believe that Stephen Gardiner thought of me save as a headstrong boy, while as for Master Bedford I bethought me that if the monk knew his whereabouts, he could send word as to the safety of his daughter of whom he knew everything, while I knew nothing. On the other hand, however, I remembered that I could do nothing in England, and it might be that if I sought out and found Faith, I might thereby be placing a weapon in the hands of those who would harm her.

It came about in this wise. After having meditated long on the monk's advice, I reflected that I dared not cross the Channel, without first of all seeing my father and Celia, so although it was ten o'clock at night, and I had ridden hard through the day, I got Phœbe saddled, and rode towards Barnet with all speed. Nothing happened to me on the way; in truth I passed through Barnet without seeing a single soul, for every one seemed abed, and the long street was as dark as a forest on a moonless night. When I got near home, however, I heard the sound of horses' hoofs, and remembering the monk's words about the Spaniard, I dismounted with all speed, led Phœbe into a field by the roadside, and waited until the night travellers had passed. It was as I said a dark night, so I could not see them plainly, but I thought that each wore a kind of monkish gown. However, I was not sure of this, neither have I to this day discovered who they were. Their words, however, startled me sorely, although I caught but one or two short sentences.

"He will surely return to his father," said one, "he hath no suspicions."

"Aye, it is well we thought of having the gates watched."

"He hath enough evidence to burn him."

"Hardly as bad as that."

"Aye, but he hath. The young blackguard tried to kill him because he would not promise to keep silence about his heresy. And in truth, my lord Bishop in his present temper will stop at nothing to stamp out heretics."

"True, but his father——"

And that was all I heard, as the two men rode slowly along, evidently on their way to London.

Now but for my conversation with the monk I should have thought but little of this, for at this time no man who favoured Protestants was safe, and plots were rife concerning them. At the same time, I who had always been faithful to the Church, never thought myself in danger, neither should I have troubled now but for what Edward Rogers had said. Directly they had passed, however, his words came back to me, and thus I determined to enter my father's house by a road unknown to strangers. It was well I did so, as events proved, for no sooner did I reach the house than late as it was my father came to the door with a drawn haggard face, and a strange look in his eyes.

"Dick!" he said in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes," I replied.

"Come in, lad, come in."

"I must stable Phœbe," I said wondering at the feverish way in which he spoke.

"Never mind Phœbe!" he cried, "come in quickly."

I followed him into the house, without a word. I noticed that he was fully dressed, and appeared like a man ready for a journey.

"You must leave here in an hour!" he cried.

"Why?" I gasped.

He looked around the room like one afraid, and then led the way to the library.

"The shutters are closed," he murmured; "it should be safe."

"What is the matter, father?" I asked. "Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Glad to see thee, Dick!" he cried, and his eyes became moist. "Glad to see thee! Aye, but, Dick, the devil is surely in it!"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Listen, my boy, and I will tell you."

CHAPTER XXVIII

HOW THE SPANIARD DROVE ME FROM HOME

NOW as may be imagined, my father's greeting, together with the conversation I had overheard, went far towards frightening me. I saw that he was much wrought upon, and that evidently a great fear filled his heart.

"Father Bennet has just left me," said my father, after again looking anxiously around him.

"Yes," I answered, "what then?"

"Master Price, your old tutor, hath fled the country."

"Why?" I asked.

"Why! Because—but we have not time to speak of that now. Listen, Dick; some men have been to Father Bennet, and they have made inquiries about you. They were sent by Bishop Bonner. News hath reached him that you were in Gloucester but a few days ago, that you howled at the priests, and tried to set Hooper, the heretic Bishop, free. It is also said that Toledo the Spaniard heard you spouting heresy, and that when he spoke to you about it you tried to kill him."

"It is a lie!" I cried hotly.

"But you have been to Gloucester, Dick?"

"Yes, father, I have," and thereupon I told him of all that had taken place since I had left him.

"Thank God the maid is safe, and unharmed," he cried fervently when I had finished.

"I would I were sure of that," I replied.

"You may be; you may be, Dick. Edward Rogers, the monk would not tell a lie, that I know right well."

"Tell me how you know, father," I said. "Who is he? and what is the mystery that surrounds him? He seems loyal, and yet he acts against the queen; he professes to be true to the Church, and yet he speaks harshly of its most faithful supporters."

"I know, and that is enough, Dick. But you must go, you must leave England at once."

"Why?"

"Because another warrant is out for you; because this time you be accused of heresy as well as treason, and the Spaniard will swear, aye, and he will get others to swear that you have spouted the lies of hot-gospellers."

"But I have not," I cried; "neither by word nor deed have I been untrue to Mother Church."

"Is that true, Dick? Not that I doubt your word," he added hastily, "but have you at any time in hot passion uttered words which could be made to mean heresy?"

"Never," I said, and I thought I spoke truly.

"But think, Dick, if you were brought before Gardiner, and Bonner, and the rest of them, could you say that the views which Master John Hooper held were damnable lies, and that he hath gone to hell for the opinions by which he held fast?"

At this I was tongue-tied, for though I tried to say "yes," the word would not escape me. While I thought I was faithful to Mother Church, I could not say that I believed Master Hooper, whom I had known as a holy man, would burn for ever in hell-fire.

When my father saw that I was silent, a strange light came into his eyes, and he started to walk up and down the room like a man demented.

"Oh, Dick! Dick! it is sad business," he cried, "a bad business; I would that I had never seen the day when I sent you off to do Stephen Gardiner's bidding. That was the beginning of it all, my son. I do not know that I can blame you altogether, but that was the first step in the trouble. Before then Stephen Gardiner was my friend, now he suspects me of favouring you, and if the worst comes to the worst, I have no influence with him. And mind, Dick, things are as black as they can be. My lord Bishop hates you because you refuse to help him in his plans, and the Spaniard hates you because you are his rival. This very night, although the Spaniard did not return to London until a few hours ago, he arranged with Bonner to send men to Father Bennet, who asked many questions about you, and I know from what he told me that your life is in danger."

"But none but heretics are put to death," I cried; "even Master Hooper might have saved himself, if he would have confessed his errors."

"Aye, if he confessed his errors!" cried my father. "But what are errors, Dick? In the present state of things anything can become heresy. Just now, when I asked you whether you believed Hooper had gone to hell, you were silent. I tell you that will be enough to burn you. I do not say that this would apply to every one; but through the influence of the Spaniard, added to your refusal to obey Stephen Gardiner, both he and Bonner would both be glad to find reason for sending you to the stake. You see," went on my father presently, "both of them hate every form of heresy; they remember they were imprisoned by the Protestants, and they are determined to destroy it root and branch. I saw them both but a few days ago, and they declared that they would not rest until every vestige of false belief were burnt out of the land. Even now there are scores in prison who have been arrested on mere suspicion. In truth no man's life is safe. As it was in Spain, so it is here; people who have private quarrels are accusing their enemies of heresy, with the result that the whole country is in a state of terror. I tell you, you must leave at once."

"Why at once?" I cried.

"Because this house is not safe! Because even now it is watched! I tell you, if I, your father, am found sheltering you, sworn enemy to the hot-gospellers as I am, it will go hard with me. The Spaniard hath the ear of the king—I mean Philip of Spain—and you know that the queen is mad to do his every bidding, to obey his slightest whim. And the Spaniard hates you, Dick—hates you! I wonder that you are not dead! Oh, Dick, go! go!"

"Very well," I said, "I will go."

"It is well, Dick, but where? You have money?"

"Plenty; but Phœbe is tired. She hath travelled many miles to-day. She ought to be in the stable now, instead of standing at the door."

"She is in the stable, Dick."

I looked at him questioningly.

"She is in the stable," he repeated; "I am well served, Dick."

"Simon Bell," I said, mentioning the name of an old servant.

"Yes. I have had to tell him many things, my boy, but it is well. I can trust him, and he understands. But you must go, Dick. It almost breaks my heart to say so, but you must. Do as the monk told you. Cross over to France, my boy, and go at once."

"I am dead tired, father, dead tired. It will not be light till eight o'clock; let me sleep till seven, then I will go. Besides, I must have a word with Celia; I cannot go away without seeing her."

To this my father consented, although I saw he was anxious beyond words. Shortly before seven in the morning, therefore, with Celia's kiss burning on my lips, and my father's blessing ringing in my ears, I again left my old home. I felt it hard, as may be imagined, and in my heart of hearts I cursed the men who had brought the country to such a pass; all the same I was not so cast down as might have been expected. I had had six hours of sleep, I had eaten a good breakfast, and although I had undergone many hardships, I never felt in better health in my life. Besides, youth loves adventure, and even in the darkest hours is inclined to paint everything in the rosiest of hues.

I could not make up my mind to leave England, however, in spite of what the monk and my father had said to me. I felt that Mistress Faith had need of me, and I determined to find her and, if possible, take her to France. But how to do this was my difficulty. I had no idea where she was, and although the monk said he knew of her whereabouts, I felt sure he would never let me know. I dare say through the whole business I acted foolishly, but it must be remembered that I was only a boy, and I was almost distraught with anxiety.

Morning was just beginning to break as I drew near Barnet, and as I knew that folks would soon be astir, I did not go into the town, but instead turned down by Hadley Church, with the intent to cross the common, close by the

great tree where I had played upon the fears of Toledo's men. I had no fear of being followed, for I had left my father's house by the private track I have mentioned, and although I had listened carefully, not one sound had I heard. I therefore remained a few minutes by the church, and recalled my experiences of months before, thinking fondly all the time of the love I bore for Faith, a love which had been growing stronger ever since. As I waited, a priest came out of the church, and accosted me.

"Good-morning, my son; you be early astir."

"Good-morning, father; yes, I have many miles to go to-day."

"Ah it is well to be young, it is well to be young. And you, I warrant, be some Court gallant."

"Scarcely, father; it is not to my liking. Besides, there be few gay doings at Court now."

"True, true. I trust true religion is coming back again, but terrible means are being used."

"Yes, terrible," I made answer, thinking of what I had seen at Gloucester.

"We live in strange times," went on the old man, "strange times. Perhaps it is judgment on the country for driving all the brothers out of the monasteries."

"Mayhap," I replied.

"It is said there are heretics in Hadley," continued the priest, "but I pray I may not be forced to bring them to book. I be a quiet man, and do my duty as a priest should. I am not extreme in any way. In Edward's time I kept the peace, and I hope I shall while Mary lives."

"Were you Protestant under Edward?' I asked.

"No, not Protestant. I only conformed, even as I do now. Good-morrow, my son, and a safe journey."

I rode on, thinking of the difference there was between this man, and many others who were almost as bitter as Stephen Gardiner himself towards heretics. And yet, when I came to remember, there were hosts of parish priests who troubled little about dogmas, and who only desired to do their work in peace and quietness. After all, those bloody deeds which blighted the last three years of Mary's reign were not the will of the whole clergy, but only of those

bigots who determined to destroy all those who would not echo every doctrine and belief of Holy Church. Many there were who were anything Henry pleased while he lived, and then became Protestants under Edward, When Edward died they turned ardent Papists under Mary, and then when Elizabeth mounted the throne they were willing to curse what they called " Mary's abominations."

By the middle of the forenoon I had reached Enfield, where I was utterly unknown, and where I stopped at an inn for a jug of ale and a little food, and then I mounted again and continued my journey towards the forest of Epping, for I had determined to go to Barcroft Hall, and see if any one there knew aught of Faith. I wanted to find out also what had happened to the estate during the many months that had elapsed since I had taken Mistress Faith away.

I did not ride hard, but the road being good (except when I had to cross a dreary flat piece of marsh near the village of Chingford) I was able to make good progress.

Early next morning I started walking to Barcroft Hall. Not that I expected much from it, because I felt sure that this would be the last place to which Faith would turn. All the same my heart was wonderfully drawn towards it, and strange hopes filled me ; besides, I longed to see again the place in which she had spent her life, so that if God should lead me to her I could give her news concerning it. I thought not of my own danger in going thither, for in spite of what my father had said, I could not believe that harm would befall me, seeing that I still held fast to the old faith. Nevertheless, when I drew near the gates, and saw a monk coming therefrom, my heart beat fast, and I instinctively put my hand to my sword. To my surprise, however, the monk seemed anxious to avoid me, but as he was turning away I saw his face. It was the man who had helped me so often, and who had told me that he knew where Mistress Faith was hiding.

CHAPTER XXIX

HOW I FOUND FAITH, AND PLANNED HER ESCAPE

"Master monk!—Master Edward Rogers!" said I eagerly.

He hurried away without speaking, but seeing that I followed him, he presently pointed to a dark copse which seemed well suited to any who desired secrecy. I therefore followed him in silence until we reached this place, and then he turned upon me angrily.

"Is this your promise?" he asked angrily.

"Have you ever loved, Master Monk?" I asked.

"A truce to such questions!" he replied with an averted face.

"Because, Master Monk," I went on, "if you have ever loved, you will know why I have not left England. How can I go until I know where my love is? If the Spaniard hath not found her, he will stop at nothing to do so. I know that he hath returned to London, and I know that the devil himself is not more cruel than he. I have tried to leave England for France, but I cannot while Faith is in danger, and while I do not know whether I can help her."

"But if you place her in greater danger by staying?"

"I cannot believe it," I cried hotly. "I would give my life for her. If I knew where I might find her, I would take her to her father in France, where she could remain until such time as the black terror of our time hath passed away."

"Boy, you are a fool!" cried Edward Rogers. "Even now I know not whether you may not have undone everything by being here. What is the use of my making plans if you are fool enough to destroy them?"

"But I know not what your plans are," I cried, "I know not who you are. I tell you, I must find Faith, and I will not leave England until I do."

"Fool! fool!" he cried; "why, think! if I were to

speak a word, you would be in prison by to-morrow morning—aye, and if you act like the madman you are I will speak."

"No you will not!" I cried.

"Why, Richard Hamstead?"

"Because you could never dare meet my father again if you did," I answered at a venture.

His head dropped as I spoke.

"I tell you," he cried presently, "she is safe now—that is, safer than if you knew where she was hiding."

"I do not believe it!" I cried.

"But she is. If she is let alone, she can remain in peace; she can be free from the Spaniard and her other enemies until better days come."

The man spoke with such earnestness that I could not help believing, and yet I shook my head like one in doubt.

"If you know where she is, tell me," I cried. "I am not a fool. I can hold my tongue."

"If I tell you," said the monk, "if I prove to you that she is in safety, will you go away?"

"If it is proved to me that I am better away I will," I said, but not in a tone of conviction.

"But you will do nothing to endanger her?" he cried.

"No, God knows I will not," I cried.

"And you will be silent—you will be cautious?"

"You know I will."

The man hesitated like one in doubt.

"It may be better he should know," he muttered. "If anything should happen he would perhaps be able——"

Then he stopped speaking, and cast an anxious look around him.

"Listen, Richard Hamstead," he said in a whisper, "Stephen Gardiner's spies are everywhere; and you know that the Spaniard would give his eyes to find her. Be cautious, be wise, for if you betray her either willingly or unwillingly, I will kill you with my own hand."

Again he paused and looked around him.

"She is at her old home," he went on. "She is hiding in a room there—a room unknown to Gardiner's minions who possess the house."

"Ah!" I cried, with a start.

"I got her there," he went on. "I arranged with Dorcas Udy and my mother. She is well; she is as happy as one in her condition can be. Now are you content?"

"But how can she be safe?" I cried.

"She is not suspected of being there," he cried, "because everything is in the hands of her enemies; and yet her knowledge of the house is so perfect that she can live in this cunningly-devised room in peace."

"The room is near the passage which leads from the house to the stables!" I cried.

"How do you know?" and he started like one frightened.

I did not answer him, for my mind was busily at work.

"And you say your mother is there?" I said.

"She hath been placed there by Stephen Gardiner."

"But there are others?"

"Aye, that is where the danger lies. If the slightest suspicion were raised all would be lost. Now you know all, Master Hamstead, so do as I bid you. Go to Rouen, find out Master Godfrey Bedford, and tell him that his child is safe."

Perhaps I ought to have promised to do this, but I could not. Now that I knew where Faith was, I longed more than ever to see her. Besides, I told myself that she ought to know where I was, and that it would be well for me to see her.

"You will be faithful?" he went on.

"Yes," I said.

"And you will never by word or deed betray me?"

"Never," I said.

"I believe you," he said. "And now I must go back to London. As for you, ride with all speed to the coast, and get a boat that will take you to Belgium or France; for I tell you, if you fall into the Spaniard's hands you are lost."

I nodded my head, for I saw the truth of his words.

"Stay here for a while," he continued, "stay an hour or more, until I be a few miles nearer London, so that no one seeing you can think we have been together."

After waiting a considerable time I found my way back

to Brentwood. I kept away from the main road, more because I thought the action would please the monk than because I had any fears for my safety. Indeed, I fancy I was trying to compromise with my conscience, for as I had determined to displease him in one thing, I tried to fall in with his desires in others.

All the afternoon I kept within the room I had hired in the tavern at Brentwood, but when night came on I went out again ; and although I tried to persuade myself to do otherwise, I made my way to Barcroft Hall.

One thing there was in my favour. I knew the cart-track which led to the stables, for I had traversed it with Faith by my side many months before, when I had taken her away from her old home. So I made my way along the road to the spot where one of Toledo's men had waited even while we hid in the wood near by.

All was silent. No moon shone in the sky, and scarcely a breath of wind played among the tree branches. It was not utterly dark, however, for the clouds had broken somewhat, and the stars appeared in the clear spaces. After listening carefully, therefore, I jumped over the gate, and crept carefully along the cart-track towards the stables. I was not long in reaching the stable door, but this, to my dismay, was, I found, locked, or bolted from within, and I knew of no way into the secret passage save by the trap-door within the building. I therefore reconnoitred very carefully, and presently saw a door in the gable of the building, which was evidently used as a means of pushing hay and corn into the loft. It was perhaps twelve feet above me, but this did not present great difficulties, as a ladder stood near. As may be imagined, I was not long in reaching the door, which to my joy I was able to open. A minute later I had entered the loft, and looked carefully around me in order to find the trap-door, by which means I could get to the horse-stalls below. After a little searching, I found this door, and then after listening quietly for a minute or more I descended by way of the ladder which I found placed there. So far all was easy, but my real difficulties were to come. I reflected that when I had found my way into the secret passage, I had yet to find

the room in which Faith had hidden. And this was no easy matter, for I knew nothing of its situation save that it was connected with the passage, concerning which I was almost as ignorant, seeing I had but once passed through it.

However, I set to work to procure a light. Means to do this I had brought from Brentwood, and when my candle was lighted I was able to make a survey of the stable. I quickly saw that it was empty; both horses and harness had been taken away, while to all appearance it had not been used for a long time. This, however, did not surprise me; but on looking around I saw what seemed to me a strange-looking pile of rubbish lying in a corner under a corn trough. On examining it, I found that it was a heap of dry horse bedding, but why should it be pushed under the corn trough? My curiosity being aroused, I pulled it away from the corner, and then I saw that the rubbish covered some hard substance. A minute later I saw four large horse-pistols, several powder-bags, and a piece of copper, which I thought I recognised as Dorcas Udy's magic looking-glass.

"This is placed here for a purpose," I mused. "Perhaps these pistols and powder are put here, so that if the secret room be discovered they can fly here, and if needs be defend themselves against their followers. It is not ill thought of, although it is but a poor place to hide fire-arms."

After covering up the things with the half-rotted horse bedding, I again listened intently, and then hearing no sound I found the secret door, and descended into the passage.

My candle burnt steadily, so I was able to find my way with ease. All the same my heart beat fast, and I could not help being afraid. I reflected that I might probably not only be putting myself in danger, but Faith as well. Still, I hurried on, the thought of seeing my love again was more to me than aught else.

After following the passage for some time I fancied that I must be getting close to the house, so I began to look around me. I listened, but all was silent as death; I examined the sides of the passage closely, but I could

detect nothing which helped me. I dared not make a noise for fear of attracting suspicion, and thus it seemed as though all my fond hopes were in vain.

I traversed the passage from end to end twice, looking carefully around me all the time, but in vain. At the one end was the ladder which led to the stable, and this so cleverly hidden that a stranger would scarcely notice it, at the other were the steps which I remembered led to the house, and which I dared not ascend.

"I am the victim of a hoax," I thought angrily; "the monk has deceived me," whereupon, as may be easily guessed, I was sore troubled. For now that I found a difficulty in finding Faith, I longed more than ever to see her.

How long I remained in the passage I know not, but it seemed hours, all the more so because no success attended my searches. I conjectured all sorts of things, but all to no purpose, and in my madness I thought of ascending the steps and knocking at what seemed a wall at the end, when I heard a slight clicking noise.

I remained perfectly still, and listened intently. My candle, although burning low, still gave a good light, and by means thereof I saw the whole of the stone steps lifting as it were bodily, while a ray of light penetrated that end of the passage. After that I heard footsteps, and in an instant I blew out my candle.

"I shan't be gone long," I heard a woman's voice say; "I'll knock when I want to come back. Three times, you know. I must get into the house for the things, as Mother Rogers may not bring it."

I heard a whisper in reply, but could detect no words; then stepping back into a dark shadow I watched while Dorcas Udy came towards me, holding a naked candle in her hand. I thought at first that she saw me, but I soon saw my mistake. The woman came only a few steps when she turned round, and watched while the stone steps fell back to their old position. Then she ascended, muttering to herself like one in fear, and then I saw the wall in front of her open silently, as if by magic. She passed silently through, whereupon it closed again, and all was silent as death.

"It is a wondrous hiding-place," I thought, then I tried to light my candle again, but I found great difficulty in doing this, for my hands trembled so that I could scarce strike a spark from the flint and steel I had brought with me. I succeeded at length, however, and then going toward the spot from which I had seen Dorcas Udy come, I gave three knocks. A clicking sound followed, similar to that which I had heard before, and then I saw the steps slowly rise again. A moment later a narrow stairway was revealed before me, which without hesitation I descended.

"Is anything wrong, Dorcas? You have returned very quickly!"

It was Faith's voice, and although I tried to answer I could not. My heart seemed, suddenly, to have grown bigger, and my tongue refused its office.

"Dorcas!" she said again, "is anything the matter?"

"It is not Dorcas," I answered.

"Who then?" she asked, for she had not as yet been able to see me owing to the strange construction of the passage by which I had come.

"A friend," I replied, for I knew not what else to say.

"What friend? What do you mean?"

I did not know what to answer, but I walked towards her until I came to the spot where I could see her, even as she could see me.

She was standing in a room which was comfortably appointed. A bright wood fire burned in an open chimney-place, there was a piece of rich carpet on the floor, and many things besides, which men pay but little heed to, but which women love. Nevertheless, I saw that she was much paler and thinner than on the night when we parted. Her eyes were filled with a look of terror and she trembled like an aspen leaf.

"Do not be afraid, Mistress Faith," I said, "there is no danger; I have only come because——because——I——could not help it."

"But you are not Richard," she said, looking at me like one who was walking in sleep, and dreaming some terrible dream. "Richard is dead! He died in prison; died because he tried to save me.

"No, not dead," I made answer, "I am alive, and strong and well. I am come to take you away from here if I may,——take you to your father."

She seemed not to understand me, but stood staring at me as though she were demented.

"I came because I could not help it," I went on. "How, I will tell you presently. But I came because my heart yearns for you, because I love you better than life. Oh, will you not speak to me?"

We were standing not far from each other, she still gazing at me with a look of wild terror, I looking into her eyes beseechingly, for in truth I was almost as distraught as she.

"I will go away if you wish it," I went on. "I came because I could not help it, and because——oh, do I frighten you? Do you hate me?"

"Hate you! Oh, my love, my dear, dear love!" and then she fell upon my neck with a sob that melted my heart, so that I, who was not given to tears, sobbed too.

CHAPTER XXX

HOW I FELL INTO THE HANDS OF TOLEDO, AND OF THE OFFER HE MADE ME

NOW, concerning what Faith and I said to each other during the next few minutes, I will write nothing. In truth, I could not if I would, for I was so overcome with the mighty joy that surged within me, that I have little idea of the words that were uttered. In my most hopeful hours I never dared to think that my love loved me. I was never bold enough to imagine that there was aught in me to call forth such a love as hers. I fancied that she might think of me kindly, and perchance was at times anxious for my welfare, but never could I believe that her heart went out to me as mine went out to her. Even if such thoughts came unbidden to my mind, I dispelled them as impossible. And so when she came to me like one overcome, when she

called me by endearing names, her hiding-place became to me as one of the mansions of God's house.

How long we talked I know not, neither do I remember the words I used in telling her of my experiences since last I had seen her. I know the telling was sweet, for I felt her hands tremble in mine, aye, I felt as though my hardships were but as the chaff which winds drive away, compared with the joy of hearing the words she spoke.

I discovered too that Toledo had spoken truly when he said that he had never seen her since the night when I was dragged from Dorcas Udy's house to the presence of Stephen Gardiner. Dorcas had proved a more capable woman than I had expected, for she had eluded the Spaniard, had taken Faith from hiding-place to hiding-place, until, by the help of the monk, she had been able to establish herself in the secret room of her old home. It turned out too that Mother Rogers was the witch to whom Toledo had come in his trouble, and it was through his superstitious beliefs that Faith had for such a long time been able to evade him. But they had to pass through many dangers, for Stephen Gardiner had sworn to get hold of Godfrey Bedford through his child, and to do this he had issued warrants for her arrest—first as one who had plotted in the Wyatt rebellion, and afterwards as a dangerous heretic. All this Faith told me, while I held her close to my heart, and so eager was I to catch her every word ,that I was unheedful of time and place, until presently I heard Dorcas Udy knocking outside.

When the steps had been raised by means of a secret spring, and Dorcas Udy entered, Faith and I were standing hand in hand, and so great was the woman's surprise that she started back with a scream. A hasty explanation revealed everything to her, however, and then we fell to talking as to what we ought to do. I soon discovered that both were weary of the long dreary days and nights they had to spend there. It is true they felt perfectly safe, because no one suspected that Faith would seek a hiding-place in a house that was closely watched, and in which Gardiner's spies had been placed. Moreover, through the monk's influence his mother had made a lengthened stay

possible, without arousing a shadow of a suspicion that they were within the house. Still, they were anxious to leave, they longed for a degree of liberty, and I could see that especially Faith suffered from the close confinement.

This being so, any plan for taking her to France was received with great joy. Especially did Faith rejoice at the thought of seeing her father again, while Dorcas naturally desired to return to her husband.

"He is purty much of a fool," remarked the dame, "but he hath been a good husband. That is," she added, "he hath done what he was told to do without grumbling."

"Do you know where he is?" I asked.

"Aye, I know," she remarked. "I expect he's made a great thick-head of himself, but he'll not go away from the place where I told him to stay."

"But doth he know where you are?" I asked.

"Know!" said Dorcas scornfully. "Do you think I was such a fool as to tell him what I thought of doing? No, young master, when I married him it was on the condition that he should do as he was told without asking questions, and I must say he hath stood to the bargain very well."

After much talking, it was arranged that I should go to the coast that very night, so as to arrange for a boat to take me across to France, and afterwards, bring horses to a sheltered place not far from Barcroft Hall. This done they could get out without difficulty, so they thought, by means of the secret passage, and by means of riding through the night we could be on board the vessel before daylight.

I found it hard to leave Faith after such a long absence; but I had to do so. I reflected that the people at the inn might be wondering about me, and I could not afford to arouse suspicion. I saw Faith's lips quiver as I rose to bid her good-night, and then I blessed Dorcas Udy's thoughtfulness in raising the steps, and going out so that she might, as she said, "see that all was right."

"You'll not let any one harm you?" said my love, looking up into my face with tear-dimmed eyes.

"Would you be sorry if aught happened to me?" I

asked, not that I did not know, but because I wanted her to tell me with her own lips.

"Sorry!" she cried, "oh, Richard, if you only knew. I heard that you were dead, that you died in prison, and ever since then until to-night I have cared but little except to evade Senor Toledo."

"But did not the monk's wife tell you about me?"

"No, I have never seen her. It was thought wisest that she should not know the means by which we got here. Oh, I think I should have died had not Dorcas told me that she had heard that you might possibly be still alive."

"And you were glad to see me? You are sure you love me, my dear maid?" I said.

Ah! Thank God for a true maid's love! It repays one for all life's woes. Danger, hardship, wounds, possible death; I minded nothing as I held her in my arms, and listened to the words she spoke.

"You will come back soon?" she said presently. "You will come and take me away from England until the dark days are over."

"I am afraid that the dark days will not be over for many years," I replied, "at any rate not until the queen's death; but be not afraid. Once with your father in France, and all will be well.

"But you will be there too!"

"Yes," I replied, "if your father will let me stay near you." But I did not remind her that I, too, was in danger in my native land.

"But be careful that no one harms you. I shall neither rest nor sleep until you come back to me."

"Nay, nay," I said, "that must not be. Perchance I may not come back as soon as I hope. It may be that days, weeks, months, will have to pass before I can come for you; but I will come back, I will come back."

"Say that again," she sobbed, "you will come back!"

"So help me God I will," I cried.

"I shall rest on that," she said, "even although you are kept long from me. I shall not give up hope. You *will* come back."

"Yes, be not afraid, my little maid. I will come back."

And that was the word I spoke to her; in truth I could say no more, for even as I spoke a great dread laid hold of me which I could neither understand nor account for. All the same I turned and smiled on her as I left the room, and even as I did so, I heard her murmuring, "but he will come back, yes, he will come back!"

Little did I think then how much she would stand in need of those words in the dark days to come.

I left Brentwood that very night, and rode with all speed towards the village of Southend, where I hoped to be able to make arrangements for a small vessel to take us across to France. I bethought, me, too, of means whereby I could get horses for my purpose, so that I might with all speed accomplish the desire of my heart.

At first I went gaily and confidently to work. The memory of my dear maid's words was constantly with me, the thought of her joy at seeing me made all things possible. But I soon found that my task was more difficult than I had thought. It is true nothing was known of the warrant that was out against me, all the same since Parliament had given Gardiner power to arrest heretics, the seaports were again guarded with much care, and all sorts of precautions were taken against any, on whom Gardiner's anger fell, escaping to France. After some days, however, when I thought I had succeeded in my purpose, that happened which drove all my plans to the winds, and placed me again in the hands of my enemies.

It happened in this wise. I was coming away from the little seaport of Shoebury, and was on the point of going to a farmer who I had been informed had two horses for sale, when I heard the sound of horses' hoofs, and from the loud laughter, and ribald jests, I judged that their riders had been drinking much strong ale.

"Gay times," I heard one say, "aye, marry, they be gay times. True the winter be cold, but we have so many fires for roasting heretics that any man can keep warm. Let us go to Hadleigh, in Suffolk, there is one there who is as stubborn as Latimer himself."

"Aye, let us go!" cried another. "Three cheers for the mass and to hell with unbelievers."

"Silence, you fools," said a voice which made my flesh creep. "silence! I swear I will take you all back to London where each man of you will be thrown into prison for drunkenness and unfaithfulness. How can we catch the fellow if you warn him of your presence?"

"Drunk, Master Spaniard! Drunk on two gallons of ale? Such a drop might go to the head of a Spaniard, but for an Englishman——faugh! I am thirsty now, and by the mass I'll get back to Hadleigh with all speed, and all the Spaniards in the world shall not stay me!"

"Then you miss your reward!"

"Reward! Aye, one can get mighty fat on the reward he gets from you. Besides, the lad is a good lad, a right good English lad. He hath beaten you twice, and I love him for it."

The men's words revealed to me the danger I was in, but I was hidden from them by a turn in the lane, and perhaps might have escaped them, had not the man with whom I had been trying to bargain for a boat, come up and said aloud—

"I've forgot, master, I can't get you across to France before Friday."

I held up my hand in warning and motioned him to be silent; but it was no use. His words had reached the Spaniard's ears, who doubtless scenting prey rose up hastily.

A few minutes later, in spite of all my struggles, I was taken, and thrown on a horse's back, to which I was bound tightly.

"The saints are good to me," said Toledo, as presently we rode away. "Besides, your own country needs you now, Master Hamstead. The queen is much interested in you, so much indeed doth she desire to see you, that I am ordered to bring you to her presence."

At this he laughed mockingly, like one well pleased.

"You did not think to see me so soon," he went on, seeing that I made no answer. "You thought you had done with me when last we met, but I forsake not my friends so easily. I am not a fool like you, Master Hamstead."

I did not reply, but I could not help looking angrily towards him.

"Aye, I know," he said, still laughing, "you wished you had slit my throat when we were in Gloucester together. Well, had I been in your place, things would have been different; but as I said, you are a fool, Master Hamstead, a fool! But there, it doth not matter now, as I think your career will soon be at an end."

"You low-born, base coward!" I cried.

"Coward!" he shouted.

"Aye, coward!" I repeated, "coward! coward!"

He struck at me savagely with a riding whip, but I minded his blow not one whit, in truth scarcely felt it, so angry was I.

"Aye, that is it," I cried, "strike a man who is bound. That is a Spaniard all over. Give me my liberty and a sword, and then you dare not come near me. Would to God I had an Englishman to deal with instead of such as thee!"

Now this saying pleased the Englishmen who rode near. I saw that they disliked the Spaniard, and I felt sure that the ale they had drunk made them somewhat careless of his commands.

"Aye, but Englishmen be near," cried one, "and by the mass thou shalt be treated as one."

"Then why am I bound like a calf about to be butchered?" I cried. "I have done naught."

"As to that I cannot say," said a young fellow, who, although he spoke in a swaggering way, and was much flushed with drink, had still a good face. "We were sent from London to take thee, because men say thou art a blaspheming heretic."

"It's a lie," I cried. "I hold by the old faith."

"Then thou shalt be tried fairly, by St. Michael and all the angels thou shalt," he shouted loudly.

"Silence!" cried the Spaniard, for at this there was a hubbub of voices, and I began to have great hopes. "I deal with Master Hamstead," he went on. "I have the warrant for his arrest, and I am responsible for his appearing before my lord Bishop," and then he rated them in such a way that they stopped speaking, and my heart grew heavy as lead.

After this we rode on quietly for some time, the Spaniard keeping at my left side, and another at my right. At length he spoke again.

"It is easy to follow such a fool as you," he said, "why a child of six years old could find you. You leave so many tracks behind. I am told that you English boys have a game called 'hunt the fox,' and that the one who goes for a fox hath to whistle at intervals to tell where he is. That is what you have been doing ever since our parting at Gloucester."

At this I feared greatly, for I wondered whether I had by any means given an inkling of Faith's hiding-place.

"You were on your way to France," he went on; "owing to the unfortunate relations betweeen that country and your own, such as you find refuge there. On consideration I am disposed to be merciful, and it may be that I can let you go there."

I knew that he had something in his mind, and I wondered greatly what it was; but I asked nothing.

"I may not tell you here what, in spite of the words you spoke to me just now, I am prepared to do for you," he continued, "but we shall presently stop for the night in an old resting-place of yours, and then I will make my meaning plain."

At this I could not help looking at him inquiringly, at which he laughed again.

"Aye, it is too dark for you to see plainly, but the house is behind those trees.'

At this I looked around me, and although the night was falling fast I thought I detected familiar features in the country-side. A minute later I saw that we were nearing the house where I had been taken many months before, and where I had been nursed through my illness.

"The property of rebels, traitors, and heretics naturally change hands in these times," he said, with another laugh; "still, what is your English proverb? 'it is an ill wind that blows good to no one!'"

Foolish words rose to my lips, but I checked them, for I dared not say anything which would even hint at Faith's whereabouts.

A little later we were all together, three men besides the Spaniard and myself, in the low-ceiled room where I had spent so many hours. A huge piece of beef was brought to the table, together with large quantities of ale, and I, although my feet were fast bound, was allowed to sit and eat with my gaolers. After the meal, the Spaniard led the way to another room, bidding me follow him. This I did by means of several jumps, the men laughing loudly all the time. No sooner were we alone together, than Toledo turned sharply on me.

"You know where Mistress Faith Bedford is," he said.

His words came so suddenly that I had no time to prepare myself for them, and I knew that my face betrayed my secret.

He started to his feet with a laugh. "It is well," he cried. "Ha, you fool, you thick-headed fool!" This he repeated again and again, while I steeled my heart, and vowed that what he discovered should avail him nothing.

"I have been somewhat unfortunate," he went on presently. "I knew when we parted last that you would try to find her. I knew too that you would seek to take her out of the country. That, of course, any child in arms, who had made your acquaintance, would understand. I therefore determined to find you, follow you secretly, and then when you were both on your way out of the country, to take you together. But these English fools of yours, who think of little but ale-drinking, spoilt my plans."

"Do you understand?" he went on after a silence, "has my meaning entered your thick English skull? I followed you to Shoebury—faugh, your ugly names!—and then I determined to watch you closely until—well, you had the little singing bird with you. And then——" He shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

He waited for my answer, but I did not speak, whereupon he continued—

"But I am willing to pay for my mistakes, and I tell you this, Master Hamstead, if you will tell me where she is—— well, you shall go whither you will unmolested. What do you say?"

CHAPTER XXXI

MY EXPERIENCES IN A LONELY HOUSE

HIS words filled me with joy, as well as with anger. He did not know where she was. Cunning as he was, and foolish as I might have been, he was ignorant of her hiding-place.

"Is it a bargain?" he went on. "Think, Master Hamstead. I tell you on my honour as a Spanish gentleman, that if you do not consent to this, you will die, either by the rope or the faggot. I have those who will swear both to your treason and to your heresy. If the latter cannot be proved against you, or if you are willing to swear by all the saints that you are faithful to Holy Church, and say that you believe that the late Bishop of Gloucester burns in hell-fire, the other will be sufficient. I have my net fully woven!"

I laughed in his face.

"Ah, you laugh, do you?" he cried, "but I will bring you to reason before I have done with you."

And then I laughed again as one who had a merry heart.

"Ah, you English pig, how I hate you!" he cried, and then I saw that his anger had overcome him. "How I hate you, loathe you, curse you! I was warned against you as my enemy, as one who was born to try and thwart me! Fool, fool that I was for not killing you long months ago; fool that I did not pay sufficient heed to the warnings of the wise! On every hand you, a fool, an ignorant boor, have thwarted me; you, a clown, a churl, not worthy to fasten my boots, are preferred before me, by the only woman I ever really loved! I spit on you, I look on you as—as——"

But I did not hear the end of the speech, because I shouted again as if with great merriment.

"Tempt me not," he cried between his set teeth, "or I shall spare the hangman the trouble of getting rid of you."

"You dare not," I cried, "you dare not!" and then I wondered if I could not use his violent temper to aid me in obtaining my freedom. Had the Spaniard been as calm as he was cunning he had despatched me long ere this.

"I dare do anything," he cried, "I——" and then by a strong effort he mastered himself, and spoke more quietly.

"I am demeaning myself," he said, "I will speak with you in a manner becoming my rank and yours." And then he swaggered up and down the room playing with the hilt of his sword.

"You can see how powerless you are," he went on presently. "You can see that you are but a child in my hands. Your life, or your death, are but a matter of my choice. My anger just now was natural, but it was unworthy of me. Such as you are really beneath my wrath, but a Spanish nobleman, even although he may thrash a snarling dog, can still be kind to him when he hath brought him to his senses. Now look 'ee. I shall be able to find this maid without you; but well——such work is not seeming for such as I. Therefore I give you the chance of telling me, and as a reward for your information I will let you go free to France, to Holland, or wherever you please. Whereas if you will not, well, I will take you to London to-morrow, and the lost souls of heretics will have cause to pity you."

"What surety am I to have for this?" I asked.

"The word of a Spanish nobleman."

"It is not enough."

"Then you shall have the surety of my lord Bishop of Winchester. Before you take me to her, you shall see him, you shall have his safeguards."

I saw the cruel gleam of his eyes, I remembered his words, and I felt sure that his promises had no more weight than thistledown. Not that it would have mattered had I believed him, but I wanted to find out his purposes.

"And she?" I said, I could not defile her name by mentioning it before him. "What will you do with her?"

"She shall be as safe as a virgin at the shrine," he said. "No harm shall come to her. I seek to find her only for the satisfaction of my lord Bishop, who, if I request him,

will promise that naught but good shall come to her. But mind you, if I am put to the trouble of seeking her, if I, a Spanish gentleman, am made to sacrifice my time and comfort for this work, in other words, if you refuse to obey me—then——"

But I will not write down the words he spoke. Even to think of them were to insult the purest maid that ever walked God's earth!

"Liar! Beast!" I cried.

"What!'

"Liar! foul liar!" I repeated. "Do your bidding! Betray her hiding-place to you! I would rather suffer as your hell-hounds made men suffer under your cursed Inquisition."

"Then look you, Master Hamstead!" he cried, and his eyes blazed with the light of a demon. "I will drag this pretty heretic of yours in the mud, so that the lowest strumpet that walks your London streets shall think it a disgrace to touch her, and after that I will——"

But he did not finish the words that came to his foul tongue. As I said, my feet were fast bound, but my hands were free, and so as we stood face to face I lifted my right hand and struck him a blow that sent him senseless to the ground. Doubtless the others had been listening, for no sooner had he fallen than they came rushing in with all speed.

"Is he dead?" asked one.

"By the Holy Virgin I hope so," said another.

All the same they sprang upon me and bound my hands.

"You will swing for this, Master Hamstead," said the young man I have spoken of as having a good face, and who I discovered was called John Pilcher.

"Why, Master Pilcher?" I asked. "Why? Can an English gentleman stand still and listen while a foul Spaniard insults our English ways and our English honour? I thought better of you than that."

"As to him——" he replied, and then without finishing his sentence he turned to examine the Spaniard more closely.

"Is he dead? Hath the fellow killed him?"

"Nay, I think not, but it was a keenly blow. Another

such, and he would never see daylight again. As it is I doubt if he will be able to travel to-morrow. He hath cracked his skull against the stone floor."

"If he dies, hell will have one devil more!"

"Aye, and earth one less."

"All the same we must do what we can for him. Do you, John Pilcher, take this young fighting-cock to the room you wot of, and guard him closely, while I see what can be done for Master Toledo. We shall have to give an account to my lord Bishop, so allow your prisoner to play no pranks. By the mass this affair will mean that a good night's drinking will be spoiled."

In truth it was plain that, although Toledo's condition sobered them somewhat, they had already drunk enough; especially was this true of Master Pilcher, whose face was flushed, and whose voice was thick.

I was taken at once into a small room, my hands and feet being tightly bound, while Master Pilcher sat beside me, his unsheathed sword being laid on the table. Presently one of the other men came.

"What news, Master Juliff?" asked John Pilcher.

"A leech hath been, and hath taken away much bad blood," laughed the other. "The Spanish dog may not move for twelve hours."

"Then we get not to London to-morrow?"

"Nay, but what matters? A day more or less counts but little."

"But Master Hamstead's bands must be loosed somewhat. See, his hands be blue."

"Aye, well, then we will loose them. I am to spend the night with you in guarding him, so we can afford to do that."

In truth I was thankful for this, because my hands had become well-nigh dead. Presently, therefore, when my blood was able to flow into my fingers I felt more at ease.

"The leech saith it was a terrible blow," said Master Juliff presently. "Well, we shall be free from his lecturing for a few hours."

The minutes passed slowly away, and after a time I saw that both grew restless.

"I would we had a box of dice," said Juliff.

"Prithee, seek some," was Master Pilcher's response, whereupon the other left the room, and returned a few minutes later with a large jar and some mugs.

"There is not a dice-box in this hole," he grumbled, "but I found some ale. This will make the night bearable, and perchance keep us awake. See, Master Hamstead, your hands be free enough to lift a mug to your mouth, so you shall drink with us."

"You drink my share," I answered, "and let me rest."

So they took me to the settle, where I laid myself down, and pretended to sleep, but all the time I watched them through my half-closed eyes, and listened to all they said.

I soon saw that I had served myself more than I wot of by striking Toledo. In spite of everything, I saw that they stood in fear of him, and doubtless in some respects he exercised a good influence over them. When he was present they dared not get drunk, but now that he lay, perhaps unconscious and weakened by his fall and loss of blood, they felt free to do as they would.

Little by little too, I saw that the strong ale was mastering them. At first they became fierce and quarrelsome, then they grew maudlin, and wept bitterly, and after that I saw that they began to grow drowsy.

"Come, drink," hiccupped Pilcher, "the jar is not empty yet."

"No, let it stand till morning. We shall both have headaches then, and we shall need a drop. Look, the young fighting-cock hath the best of it. He snores like a tom-cat."

"Aye, I feel drowsy myself. But we must not sleep."

"No," said Juliff, "we must not sleep."

"I made a vow, a solemn vow when Mary May jilted me, that I would make her sorry. I vowed to get into favour at Court, and then when I was a great man, I——I——would ——what did I say?" And his head dropped on his chest.

"What did you say," stammered Juliff, "the saints only know. You are drunk, man."

"Drunk!" said Pilcher, "drunk on two gallons of beer. I'll let you know. I could drink four gallons, and not

know it, save for a headache in the morning. I——I—— let's have the rest."

He managed to fill his mug again and drank.

"You're afraid," he said, "you—you're 'fraid of good ale. Why, there's nothing to fear. Old Toledo is as good as dead. I wish the young spark had killed him, but you, you are afraid to drink.

"I afraid? Never. Never again anger a friend like that, Jack Pilcher. Never tell lies about one who can drink more than any man in the country."

Their voices were thick, so thick that they could scarcely speak.

"Is he asleep?" said Pilcher.

"I——I—, yes——by the bless'd Virgin he hath——"

And then both of them mumbled unmeaningly, and moaned much, like I have heard a dreaming dog moan. A few minutes later they were unconscious.

"Blessed be the ale that made them drunk," I thought, but I did not move for a time, and it was well that I did not, for presently Pilcher lifted his head.

"Juliff, Juliff, get up."

But Juliff slept on.

"I'll go and tell Jack Barker. No man ought to be drunk when on guard! I'll go."

"Hamstead is asleep," he muttered, "so he's all safe."

He rose to his feet.

"What's the good of going to Jack Barker? He's drunk enough."

He sat down again and laid his head on the table.

I waited five minutes, but neither moved. "All is well," I thought, and I began to carry out the plan I had been meditating. I knew that I must be careful, for I knew not who was in the house. I fancied that Pilcher was right when he said that Barker would be drunk, but I knew not what arrangements Toledo might have made with the people who kept the house. Still I knew I must act at once. If there were any sober people near, they might feel it their duty to visit my chamber, and then, seeing I was bound, I might not be able to do anything for myself. I knew too that the Spaniard would never give me another chance

of liberty, if he woke to find me still in his power.

I listened carefully, but all was silent save for the heavy breathing of Pilcher and Juliff, so I noiselessly slipped from the settle, and crawled as well as I could to the table where Pilcher's naked sword lay. A few seconds later I had cut the leathern bands by which I was bound; this done I buckled the sword to my side, and considered how I could get out. During my former stay I had learnt much about the house, and this stood me in good stead, now for by means of my knowledge I was able to creep out quietly.

Once in the open air I breathed a sigh of relief, for the breath of liberty was sweet. I listened, and all was silent, then I reflected whither to go.

"I'll have Phœbe," I cried, for the Spaniard had taken care to find out where she was, and had brought her with us. I therefore found my way to the stable, but it was so dark that I could not tell in which stall she stood.

"Phœbe, my beauty," I said, and she gave a low answering whinny.

A few minutes later I had saddled her, and had brought her into the yard, and even as I did so, I heard shouts in the house. My escape had been discovered, "Catch me if you can," I said, and a few minutes later I was galloping towards London.

After I had ridden a few yards I stopped and listened. "Towards London," I heard some one say. Then I laughed, for it decided my course of action.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE PASSING OF WEARY YEARS

I RODE some distance towards London, then my eyes having got used to the darkness of the night, and seeing a low place in the hedge by the roadside I jumped it, crossed a field, and rode towards Shoebury with all speed. I remembered that the man from whom I tried to get a boat had told me that had I been ready to sail this very night he could take me across to Belgium, as he had necessity to

take goods thither, but he could not wait longer, as he felt sure that the change of moon would bring bad weather.

"It is a good plan," I thought, "no one will suspect me of going to the place where I was captured, and I heard them mention London." So with a much lightened heart I rode thither. I was much tempted to ride back to Barcroft Hall, but I dared not. I reflected that I should probably be revealing Faith's hiding-place by going thither, and would again place myself in danger. Doubtless the Spaniard had given many instructions, and had made many provisions concerning me, so while it hurt me sore to go away from her, I must perforce, for her sake as well as mine, leave the country at once. For the present at all events she was safe, and perchance when I reached Rouen, her father might know of means whereby a message could be taken to the monk at St. Paul's Cross.

My great anxiety was to get to Shoebury before the boat started, so as soon as I reached the road again, at a sufficient distance from the house where Toledo was, I gave Phœbe rein, and in good time reached the spot from which the vessel was to sail. Here fortune again favoured me; the vessel had not started, but I could not persuade the captain to take me across without much trouble. The news of my capture had spread around the neighbourhood, and all sorts of stories were rife concerning me. Luckily, however, Toledo had not discovered my money, which I had placed in a leathern belt close to my body, and so, as I offered the man more than he could gain by the carriage of his whole cargo, he consented to take me.

Now of what happened to me on my way to Ostend, and of my long journey from thence to Rouen there is no need that I should write at length. I knew not a word of the language, while even the direction in which Rouen lay was a mystery to me. Still I managed to get there after some days' riding, and was wonderfully delighted with the town. In truth I had imagined that France was a kind of desert, and that the French people were very nearly savages. I found, however, that in some parts the country was nearly as fair as England itself, while most of the people were seemingly kind-hearted and hospitable. It is true

that here and there I found my country in bad odour, and on one occasion I thought I should have got into trouble. In truth had I known what was said I doubt not I should have been killed. For afterwards when I had picked up a smattering of their lingo, I found that they had called me an English dog, and had told me that the English were only fit to live with French pigs. But, as I said, I knew nothing as to the meaning of their jabbering at the time, and could only judge by their looks that they were really angry. Had I understood their meaning I should doubtless have fought them, and they (being many, and I only one) would probably have killed me. And so most likely my ignorance saved my life.

I arrived at Rouen in the evening, and so could see but little of the town, but even then, the moon by this time having appeared again, I thought it wondrous fair.

Now it would doubtless give amusement to some, could I describe properly my endeavours to find the tavern called the Red House, for the people laughed at my question as though I had tickled them. As was natural, this made me angry, and the angrier I looked the more they laughed. Presently, however, I bethought me of the monk's advice that I should ask for the great church. So having learnt that they called a church *l'église*, and that *grande* meant big, I kept on saying, "*La grande église*," and even then I could make but litle headway, for they had a different way of saying it from English people. After much experimenting, however, and making a guess at what they meant, I at length found myself before a tremendous church, which was as I thought a credit to the town. Still, it was not the church that I cared so much about, but the inn called the Red House. I discovered, however, through my many questions, or thought I did, that *où est* meant "where is," so presently I got to saying, "*Où est la maison rouge?*" This the people seemed to understand, but even then I was advantaged but little, for when they made strange gestures, jabbered wildly, and pointed one way and then another, I knew nothing of what they meant. At last I did what I ought to have done at first. I took a piece of money from my pocket, showed it to a youth, and said as well as I

could, "*Où est la maison rouge?*" Whether he understood my lingo or no I could not tell, but he nodded his head and said "*Suivez.*" Then he walked away, while I stood watching him. After he had gone a few steps, he turned around, and seeing me standing still, cried again "*Suivez,*" but not knowing what he meant, I still remained standing whereupon he beckoned me to follow. This I did, thinking he must have some meaning, and ere long I found myself in front of an inn built of red stone.

After this my troubles were practically at an end, for the people there recognised the name Bedford, and showed me into a room with the words, "*Restez ici.*"

After waiting some time I heard a whispering outside the door, but whether those who spoke were English or French I know not, for their words were too low for me to understand. At length the door opened, and two men entered, who I at once saw were Killigrew and Master Godfrey Bedford.

At first, the light being dim, they did not recognise me, but presently having held a candle close to my face, Master Bedford saw who I was.

"Master Hamstead!" he cried

"Aye," I answered.

"Where come you from?" he asked.

"May Master Killigrew know everything?" I asked.

"He may," replied Master Bedford, "and yet perchance there are some things you would tell me that are for my ears alone."

"I think there are, Master Bedford," I replied.

"Then tell me, in God's name," he said, and then as if doubts had crossed his mind, he said, "but let us understand, Master Hamstead, you come to me this time as a friend."

"Stephen Gardiner hath set a price upon my head," I replied.

"That is well, so speak quickly. But stay, you be hungry and tired, let us have food and wine."

"No," I said, "let me tell you what is in my mind first, and I will eat afterwards."

So Tom Killigrew having left the room, I told Master Bedford everything I could remember, especially those

portions of my experience which related to Faith. As I told my story he was much wrought upon, and I could not help noticing that he looked many years older than when we parted after the secret meeting at his house. Then he was inspired with the hope of dethroning Mary, enthroning Elizabeth, and of bringing back the Protestants to power. Now he spoke and looked as one who had been beaten on every hand. But more than that, since his escape to France his wife had died, while his only child had become dependent on the help and protection of an old servant. Indeed, strong man though he was, I saw during my narrative he was well-nigh broken down with grief and anxiety.

"I had heard parts of your story before," he said at length.

I looked at him questioningly.

"Aye," he went on, "but for the knowledge of much you have told me I could not have remained here. I know that a price is set upon my head, I know that Stephen Gardiner would move heaven and earth to drag me to the block, but I would have gone back for my little Faith had I not known something of what you have told me."

"How, Master Bedford?" I asked.

"Tom Throgmorton told me that my dear wife was dead," he said; "he escaped some months after you saw Killigrew, and brought me the news. He also said that you had taken my little maid to a place of safety."

"How came he to know it?" I asked.

"Can you not guess?"

"The monk at St. Paul's Cross!"

"Aye, the monk."

"Who is he, Master Bedford? Why should he interest himself in you, and me, and others?"

"Do you not know?"

"No."

He seemed about to speak, but his feelings overcoming him, he started up and walked up and down the room like one demented.

"My little maid," he said at length, "is she well?"

I told him I hoped so, while he watched me steadily.

"Why have you done all this?" he asked.

"Because—— because I love her," I answered.

"And doth she love you?'

"Aye, thank God, I have hopes that she does."

After this he asked me many questions, which I answered as well as I could, nevertheless I am afraid I gave but a sorry account of myself, for I am not good at words.

"I would you had killed the Spaniard," he said presently.

"I would I had," I replied, "and yet——well, I could not."

"No perchance you could not. Richard Hamstead, I thank you, I thank you!" and then I saw the tears roll down his face.

"I suppose I brought all this on myself," he said after awhile, "but I could not help it. Aye, and I would do it again. Why, think what the country hath come to! Think of it! Faggot and fire, stake and murder; men, women, and children walking in fear of their lives. A cruel, bigote,d merciless woman on the throne and bloodthirsty murderers as her advisers. I saw it all. I saw it all. I knew that if Mary and Gardiner got power we should see hell-fire in the land."

"Perhaps a better day will come soon," I said.

"A better day? A better day? But when? Not until Mary is dead. And she may live twenty or thirty years. And I——I can do nothing. I am fastened like a rat in a gin. Aye, I have had to stay here while my wife died—— died of a broken heart. I have been penned up here while my little maid hath been hunted like a rabbit. Good God, I wonder I am alive! And yet I dared not go back. I should have done more harm than good. I know that for a year spies have watched for me, and all sorts of schemes have been afoot to drag me before Gardiner and the rest of them. But for the mercy of God, and the faithfulness of my friends, I had ere this have been decoyed back, and then——then I should have been burned like Master John Hooper, or beheaded like Wyatt."

"I would have brought Mistress Faith here," I said; "I did my best."

"Impossible, boy, impossible! Thank God the Span-

iard found you when he did, for if she had been with you —then ;—but it is better as it is. She is safe there. I know the place well. My forefathers little thought when they planned it, that it would serve one of their descendants so well ! But you have been a brave lad. You have made mistakes, but they have been natural to a boy ; besides, who am I that I should talk of mistakes ! The country is doomed, doomed ! And God seems to be against us."

" I have been thinking whether it be not possible to devise a plan whereby we can get back to Barcroft Hall and bring Mistress Faith hither," I said. " Surely if we hire a vessel on this side, and make arrangements for horses it should be easy."

" I fear not, I fear not. But we will see. She is safe now, and Dorcas Udy is as faithful as a mother."

" But how can we see ? " I asked. " What means have you of knowing anything ? "

" The same as we have had in the past," he said ; " but here is food, lad. Eat, and drink ; you are hungry and tired.

After this many weeks passed away without aught happening, until I, ever thinking about Faith, grew almost crazy with anxiety ; for now that I had got to France, and was thus out of the reach of my enemies, I thought little of the danger I should be in in England, and I longed to return more than words could say. Presently, however, when the news reached us of the wholesale slaughter that went on in my native land, and how not only bishops and clergymen of high standing were brought to the faggot, I began to see that Master Bedford was wise in keeping me from going thither. In truth the stories we heard, even in France,of the doings of Bonner and others, made our blood curdle, and although I could not take on with the Protestant Faith, being born and reared a Catholic, I hated the hellish deeds that were done, and would have defied Bonner, had I been brought before him, as boldly as any hot-gospeller.

I soon discovered that it was always through the monk at St. Paul's Cross that our news reached us, and I was mightily pleased when presently I was informed that Faith was still in safety and that she had been told why I had been unable to take her from her hiding-place. Whenever

I asked, however, for information as to this same monk, Master Bedford shook his head and refused to speak a word. I hotly contested the advice that I should not seek to return to England ; but when the foolishness of my doing so was urged upon me, I had to be content, and continued to remain at Rouen.

But for my constant anxiety, I think I should have been happy there, for presently I got interested in learning the French speech, and although much of their food was not fit for a man to eat, and many of their ways past finding out, I grew to be very friendly with them. I also visited many of the towns in the neighbourhood of Rouen, and sailed down the river to a place called Havre, which, although small and unimportant, struck me as more than ordinarily suited for a large harbour.

Presently I ceased to take much notice of time, for when Master Bedford, through the advice of the monk, absolutely forbade my taking steps for bringing Faith to France, I grew moody and took but little heed of anything.

After many months of weary waiting, news reached us that Stephen Gardiner was dead, at which we all rejoiced greatly. And yet I write the words with hesitation, for although I had everything to fear from him, I never learned to hate him. Nay, all through the time I knew him there was a sense in which I admired him greatly. He was, as I have said before, the cleverest man in England, and in spite of his harsh ways I believe he had the welfare of the country at heart. As for his hatred of Protestants, and his desire to exterminate them, I believe he thought he was doing the will of God. If ever a man thought that they were the children of the devil, it was he, and, as a consequence, he could not see how a country could have the smile of God while it allowed His enemies to live. Besides, the Reformers had cast him into prison, and had submitted him to indignities, and he was not a man to forgive such things easily. Being a man of strong passions, therefore, and desirous of making everyone submit to his iron will, he had spared no effort in trying to destroy those who, he believed, were enemies both of their country and their God. Therefore, in spite of my admiration for him, I could not help

rejoicing at his death. True, he was strong, and wondrously clever, but he was as cruel as death, and I do not believe a thought of mercy entered his mind when his desires were in question.

"We shall be able to go back now," said Master Bedford. "I shall see my little Faith again, and be able to hold up my head among my fellows."

"But Mary still lives," said Tom Killigrew, and she thinks not of mercy."

"But still she is a woman," said Master Bedford. "According to Renard she hath done all because of Gardiner; now he is no longer at her elbow, she will let her woman's heart plead."

With this in our minds we made preparations to leave France, but before all was ready another message arrived, telling us to stay where we were. Gardiner's death, we were informed, had not altered the queen's purposes; nay, rather she had grown more bitter, and more determined to crush all heretics and traitors. As all the world knows, she longed greatly for a son, and believed more than once that God had answered her prayers. In truth at one time all the church bells in London were set a-ringing because she declared that her heart's desire was to be gratified. But as time went on, and no child was born to her, she grew bitter and disappointed; indeed, those who knew her best say that life was a burden to her. Added to this, too, she believed that her husband, Philip of Spain, had ceased to love her, and because of these things she thought God would not smile on her.

Whether Cardinal Pole and Bishop Bonner fanned the flame of her hatred towards heretics, I know not; but it was reported to us that she believed that she had committed the sin of Saul, who, when told to slay all the enemies of the Israelites, women and children, as well as men, had only killed a part of them, and had thus called down the wrath of God upon him. So she thought that God was angry with her for burning only a part of the heretics, while He demanded the extermination of all who did not unswervingly believe in the Catholic faith. This being so, she had published her will that short work should

be made of all unbelievers, and we were warned not to put foot on English soil.

And so we waited, week after week, and month after month for a better day to dawn, but no news reached us that clemency had entered Mary's heart; instead, we heard of deeds which made us sick with anguish and despair. After this a worse thing happened, at any rate so it seemed to me. For one day a messenger arrived who told us that Faith had been taken prisoner, and dragged to London. Only one crumb of comfort did the messenger tell us, which was that she was more comfortably lodged than many, and that every chance would be given to her for repentance.

As may be well guessed the news drove us well-nigh mazed, and could I have seen the shadow of good in going to England, I would have braved all danger, and gone thither; but even I saw that naught could be done, for the prisoners were safely guarded, while my own life would not have been worth a groat if I had yielded to my wishes.

And so we had perforce to wait, while the time dragged wearily on. How I bore it I know not, for the pains of hell gat hold of me; in truth, as winter succeeded summer, and summer succeeded winter, and no news reached us, save that Faith was still in prison, and still refused to deny her faith, I cursed with bitter cursing both queen and churchmen who had brought her to such a pass.

Then after a long time news reached us that turned our hearts cold, but nevertheless made us saddle our horses, and ride to England with all speed.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE MAID, AND THE FAGGOT,—AND GOD

THIS was the news: Faith had been condemned to die. She had resisted the appeals of all who had been sent to her, and had preferred death rather than give up her faith.

"My poor little child, my poor little maid!" sobbed

Master Bedford, as we galloped to the north coast of France "My only child! the little one that I nursed on my knee and carried in my arms! And they will burn her! Oh God, save her!"

But I could not answer him. My heart was like a stone, my teeth were set, my eyes were turned northward as if I would pierce the distance between me and her, while all the time I vowed that I would slay her murderers with my own hand.

"It was my fault," went on Godfrey Bedford. "You would have gone to England, you would have tried to have saved her; but I, because I was older and more cautious, forbad you."

Still I said nothing. The words he had uttered were true, and yet even now I doubt if I should have acted wisely had I followed the bent of my will. The Spaniard had sworn my destruction, while Godfrey Bedford, a follower of Wyatt and a heretic, would not have been safe for an hour. We had acted for the best, we had thought Faith to be out of danger at Barcroft, while after her imprisonment it were worse than madness to ride to London; neither did we believe that any one possessing a human heart could condemn her to death.

Even now we were riding straight into the jaws of death but we thought not of that. She was condemned to die; the day of her burning had been fixed, and so, although a thousand deaths stared us in the face, we could do no other than go. My one fear was that we should be too late, for I knew the Spaniard's heart, knew that Bonner had no mercy towards those who opposed his will.

We got into a vessel at Havre, and from thence we sailed with all the speed we could towards Southampton. The voyage was stormy, but we heeded not the storm, save to fret and fume because it checked our speed, and no sooner did we set foot on English soil than we obtained horses and started our ride to London. We heeded not the talk in the town, pleasant as it was to hear our own language again, neither did we have mercy on our horses. When we had covered half the distance, and the poor things could go no further, we bought others, and galloped right

on. Some asked us questions, but we answered them not; others told us of the queen's illness, but the news seemed as naught. She had been ill for years, and yet had not died. Even through the loss of Calais she had lived, neither had famine and disease softened her heart. We thought but little of Mary therefore, save to curse her for encouraging such as Bonner in the bloodiest work that ever blackened our English records. And so we rode firmly on, galloping steadily side by side.

We had no plan in going to England. It is true I had determined in my madness to offer myself to die in Faith's stead; but even then I felt sure it would be of little use. Still we could not help seeking to be with her, at the last. Godfrey Bedford was her father, and I was her lover, and so we must perforce go to her, reason or no reason.

The rain fell heavily, I remember, and as our horses dashed along we became covered with mud; but we heeded neither rain nor mud. I wanted to see my Faith, and if need be to die with her.

It was on the evening of the sixteenth day of November when we entered London, and without heeding aught we rode straight to Whitehall. All caution had fled to the winds, our own safety we minded not.

"I would see Bishop Bonner," I said, as I reached Whitehall, to the man who guarded the portals of the house, where years before I had seen Stephen Gardiner.

"Then you will have to wait, young master," he replied.

"Where is he?"

"With Cardinal Pole."

"And where is Cardinal Pole?"

"On his death-bed!"

"At Lambeth?"

'Aye, at Lambeth, but you will do no good by going thither. He will see no man."

"I would see him concerning a maid condemned to die for heresy at Smithfield to-morrow."

"What is the name of the maid?"

"Mistress Faith Bedford."

"Aye, but you be too late, my master. She suffered at Brentwood this morning."

"Are you sure of this?" I cried aghast, for I reeled as though some one had struck me a blow.

"Aye, sure."

"But no, my man, no! It was given out for to-morrow!" I cried like one demented.

"Was it?—I thought it was to-day! True, no news of the affair hath come to hand; but no, young master, it was to-day. But what is this?"

I turned, and saw that Godfrey Bedford had fallen as if in a swoon. That which had made me reel had struck him down.

He was not dead. His lips still moved, and his eyes were wide open, yet he looked like a dead man.

"Who is he?" said the man.

I did not answer, but tried to lift him up.

"By the mass, it be Master Godfrey Bedford!" he cried.

"Aye," I said, "and what then, master?"

"What then? why, if he had come here a week ago, why! but take him to an inn, young master, take him right quickly, for the wolf's teeth are still showing."

How I got Master Bedford to an inn I know not, nevertheless with the aid of bystanders, I did at length get him there, but although I did all in my power for him he seemed like one unwilling to return to life. But of this, as well as of other matters, I was scarce able to judge, for I was well-nigh mad. I have thought since, that Master Bedford's condition, and the attention I had to give him, saved me from becoming a raving lunatic. After some time, however, I was able to recover myself, and then it was that I bethought me of the scarcity of the information I had received. So at length, leaving him with the woman of the inn, I started to walk towards Fleet Street, and when I reached the prison, I asked many questions about Faith. And here my last hope was dispelled, for I was told that she, after much and long persuasion, had refused to forswear her errors, and had several days before been taken to Brentwood, that she might die near the place where she had been reared. Another reason given for her removal thither, was, that owing to the great indignation of the

people, and the growth of discontent with the burnings, Bishop Bonner was afraid to carry out his will in London, and had sent her quietly to Brentwood, that she might burn on the same spot that William Hunter and so many others had suffered for their beliefs.

By this time a great unnatural calm had come upon me, so that I was able to ask and answer questions. I was able to think clearly too, and I wondered why it was that no man sought to molest me. For although the gaoler of whom I asked questions, told me that he knew a warrant was out against me, he sought not to touch me, neither indeed did he offer to interfere with my liberty.

"It is a pity the business could not have been put off for a few days," he said at length.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because—well, because it is hoped that better days are coming."

"What mean you?" I asked.

But he only shook his head, whereupon I returned to the inn where Godfrey Bedford lay. He was still like a man in a trance, but the leech who had been summoned, having taken away much blood from him, told me that he had hopes of his recovery.

And now I have that to tell which may not be believed, for truly it is strange beyond thinking; all the same, what I write is true. Not that I hope to make it plain, for ever since I had spoken to the man at Whitehall, and had heard what he told me, I had not been my own man. Even when a great calm fell upon me at the prison, and when my mind seemed clear, I did not feel as though I was Richard Hamstead at all, but some alien who heard dread news concerning others.

I know not what o'clock it was, for I took no heed of time, and as I sat by Master Bedford's bedside, listening to his strange muttering, and watching the wild look in his eyes, all sorts of wild fancies possessed me. Some, to whom I have related my experiences, have told me that I fell asleep, others again that I had a vision. Concerning this, however, I cannot speak with certainty. This I know while I was in the room by Master Bedford's side, I saw

the door open, and I beheld a figure clothed in white from head to foot. It was a woman's figure, I was sure, although I saw not the face, while the robe she wore was loose, falling from her shoulders to the ground.

I started up, for I knew not what it meant.

"Richard, Richard."

"Yes," I said, "you are Faith?"

"Come to me," she said.

"Yes, I will come; where?"

"To Brentwood."

"When?" I asked.

"Now."

And then the figure vanished away. I think I must have been in a dream, for had I been truly awake I should have gone to her, I should have tried to clasp her in my arms. Nevertheless all was as real to me as anything I had ever known. For a time I think my nerves must have given way, or I must have lost my senses, for presently I found myself lying on the floor, while close by, Master Bedford was murmuring something about his "little maid in the midst of the flames."

Without hesitation I buckled on my sword, and with much ado aroused the innkeeper.

"What want you?" he asked drowsily.

"Your good wife must watch by the sick man's bed," I said, "and you must get me a horse."

I had much trouble in persuading him to do aught, but I succeeded at length, and in less than an hour's time I was riding towards Brentwood as fast as the horse could carry me.

Even now that ride seems like a dream. The streets of London, the lonely lanes, the nestling farm-houses, all come back to me as though I had dreamed them. All the same I knew they were real, and although I could not explain it, I knew I was going towards Faith. For whatever those who read this may think, I felt the summons to be real. Whether she was dead or alive I knew not, but I was sure she had come to me, and that there was something for me to do at Brentwood. Of my long journey I thought nothing, weariness I wot not of, my sinews seemed

to be made of steel, and in spite of everything hope was in my heart.

I knew the road well, for I had traversed it more than once, and I remember that I noted the trees and the houses which I had passed before. I was calm too, strangely calm, but my heart lay like a great hot stone within me.

As I said, I knew not what o'clock it was, neither did I think of it. I remember, however, that I wondered why we had not been arrested, seeing that warrants were still out against us. I called to mind, too, strange hints made by the gaoler, and thought of his words about it being lucky for me that he had not seen me a week before. But all this came in a vague sort of way; even at the time, I knew that I did not estimate events naturally.

"I am dazed because the man at Whitehall told me that we were too late," I said again and again. But never once did I slacken my speed. The horse was a good one, large of bone, and well fed. My own Phœbe was fleeter of foot, and yet I doubt whether she would have covered the journey so easily as this sad-eyed animal, which dashed on, up hill and down dale, as though he knew not the difference between the two.

Presently I saw a grey streak in the sky. "It is morning," I said; but I thought not of what it meant, I made no guess of what lay before me.

It was the morning of the seventeenth day of November, in the year 1558, and although I did not know it, that had been happening during the night which would change the life of millions, aye, and the destinies of nations. Little did I know of the solemn scene which had taken place not so very far from the room wherein Master Bedford lay; but if I had known, it would have made no difference. I had been called, and I must go whither my love willed.

Presently I drew near Brentwood. It was a grey, dark morning, such as is often seen during the month of November, but it did not rain. I felt glad for this, why I knew not, but such is the fact. Not a man was astir, and yet I saw many footmarks in the lonely road.

I knew not what I should do when I got to Brentwood, but that did not seem to matter. Faith had called me, and

she would lead me aright. Not a soul did I see in the village, and yet I thought I heard the sound of voices in the distance. It seemed, too, as though the atmosphere was laden with suspense.

I drew up to the inn at which I had stayed many long months before, and shouted. I remember that I shuddered at the sound of my voice, for it seemed as though I were in a waste place. For a time no one answered, then I shouted again, and still all was silent. Fastening the horse to a ring at the door, I entered the inn, but no one was to be seen. After a time I found my way into the kitchen, where an old woman was busy cooking something.

"Holloa! where's the ostler?" I shouted.

The dame turned slowly.

"I be deef," she said; "what do 'ee want?"

"The ostler!" I cried.

"Oa, ay," crooned the dame, evidently not hearing what I said, "everybody is gone to the burnin'. I would ha' gone myself, but for my poor bones."

"The burning?" I cried.

Still she did not hear me, but went on muttering.

"At the same place. Poor Willie Hunter was burned there first, and since then scores of others. All at the same place, and everybody be there. Nine o'clock is the time. It should ha' bin three days agone, but it 'ave bin put off."

I rushed out of the house, with but one thought in my mind. I heeded not the horse, which stood sweating and panting by the door of the inn, but with a deadly feeling at my heart I ran with the speed of the wind. I knew nothing of, nor thought of direction, and yet in a few minutes I found myself near a great concourse of people.

No one turned at my approach, and yet I thought men made way for me as I struggled through the crowd. I saw that many were sobbing, while some looked stern-eyed and angry. Others again seemed to regard the affair as a fine entertainment, something to be talked about in the coming days.

Presently I reached the inner circle of the multitude, where was an open space, and in the centre thereof was

a stake stuck in the ground. For a moment my eyes were blinded, so that I could not see, and then, oh God! I was like one paralyzed. I could neither speak nor move. I could do nothing save look with terror-stricken eyes on that which appeared before me.

Bound to the stake, and clothed in the same white robe I had seen hours before in London, was Faith! Around her stood some priests, one of whom was weeping bitterly, while another expostulated with him for his weakness.

"Here is pardon for you if you will recant," said one. "Recant your errors, disavow your false doctrines, and you shall be forgiven."

Then Faith spoke, and her voice thrilled me from head to foot.

"No," she said clearly, "I cannot recant."

"You still hold fast to your errors?"

"I hold fast to my faith in my Saviour."

"Then you must die!"

At this she did not speak, but her lips moved as if in prayer. And still I was unable to move, still I was unable to utter a word.

"Methinks a little more time should be given to her even yet," said the priest whom I had seen weeping, and whom I blessed for his kindness of heart. "She is but a young maid, and the truth will come to her."

"No, not so," said another voice, and at the sound thereof all my blood turned to gall. "We have already delayed too long. My lord Bishop's command was that the affair should be despatched quickly, and he will not be pleased when he is told."

"But although her belief be false, she is pure and kind of heart," said the priest; "let us plead with her another day, and our Lady may give her grace."

"No," said another, of cruel face, "she must die. What say you, Sir John?"

"Let the matter be proceeded with at once," said a stout man in a low husky voice.

"Ay, place the faggots;" it was the Spaniard who spoke again.

Even now I wonder at myself, for I had no more power

to speak nor move than if I had been a dead man. But I knew the power would come.

"Bring the torch!" said the Spaniard.

At this Faith cried out like one in agony. "Richard," she cried, "you said that you would be sure to come back to me."

At that all my life came back, and regardless of everything I rushed forward.

"Ah, here comes another heretic," I heard the Spaniard say, but that was all, for I caught him in my hands, and I lifted him above my head just as if he were a boy of five years old, and then, in my loathing and in my passion, I hurled him from me as though he were an adder who tried to sting me. I heard him fall to the ground with a thud, but I took no notice of him, and from that day to this I have never seen him, neither do I know where he is, or how he fares. In truth, I thought of nothing save my love, who stood by the stake, her eyes turned towards heaven.

"Back, back, you hell-hound!" I cried to the priest who held the torch, and then I took the faggots and threw them from me as though they had been bits of kindling wood.

"Richard! Richard!"

It was Faith who had seen me, and who had called me by my name.

I clasped her in my arms, and held her close. I knew nothing of the surging throng, I heeded not their strange cries! Why should I? I held Faith in my arms; nor dreaded I the future, even although in holding her to me, I held also the stake to which she was fastened.

"Faith! Faith! I am come to you, my wife!" I said, and our lips met in a kiss of love.

"Drag him away! drag him away!" cried an angry voice.

But no man laid hands on me, as I held her in my locked arms.

And after that I know of but little that happened. I heard angry voices, mingled with many protestations, then there was a strange silence, like the silence of death, after

which a great roar rent the heavens. At least so it seemed to me, but I could not tell truly, for I felt my senses leave me. I opened my eyes, but I could not see, while the sound of voices grew more and more distant. After that I felt as though I was floating away in some far-off clime, I could not tell where; but I was not afraid, neither was there any sorrow in my heart, for I knew that I held my love in my arms.

CHAPTER XXXIV

SIR RICHARD HAMSTEAD

WHEN I came back to life again, I found myself lying flat on the ground, while above me Faith stood—her eyes luminous with joy, her face wreathed with smiles. She was still clothed in her long white robe, but her hands and feet were free.

"Are you harmed, my dear love?" I asked, heeding not the great shouting, surging crowd around.

"Not a hair of her head hath been singed, neither hath the smell of fire passed upon her," said the priest who stood by, and who had pleaded for delay.

It seemed to me as though I had been long unconscious, but truly it had been but for a few minutes.

"Tell me, my little maid," I said, "is all well?"

"All is well, Richard, you have saved me."

"How, will they not——"

"Listen," said the priest. "Do you not hear?"

And this question was not without reason, for truly the crowd shouted and laughed as if they had been drunk with good wine.

"God save the Queen!" they cried; "God save the Queen! Another cheer, my lads, and cry again, God save the Queen!"

"What doth it mean?"

"The queen is dead!"

"Dead!"

"Aye, she died at early morning; the messenger came just as you——"

"But the people are crying 'God save the Queen.'"

"Aye, they mean the new queen, Queen Elizabeth.'"

"And that will mean that she——"

"Bad days are gone," cried Sir John Bennet, who had given the command for the torch to be lit. "It will mean —aye, it will mean that men can go around with a merry heart! That they can speak, and think again! That's it, lads, God save our good Queen Elizabeth!"

"But it was well you came," cried a bystander; "had you not been here, she would have been dead before the news came."

At this I blessed God greatly, for I believed then, as I believe now, that it was His hand that led me to Brentwood, that it was His will for me to save my dear love.

I was my own man again presently, and was able to understand the purport of things. It seems when I had pulled away the faggots, and held Faith in my arms, that the crowd became much divided in feeling. Some would have knocked me on the head and dragged me from her, while others were of a different opinion. This led to some delay, and while they were disputing as to what should be done, a messenger came saying that the queen was dead, and that the ministers were going to Hatfield, where Elizabeth was staying, to offer their allegiance to her, and to proclaim her queen. After this there was no thought of death—nay, so much were the people rejoiced that there was no thought of imprisonment. Thus it was that, although Faith was still under the ban of the law, no one thought of laying hands on her. Instead, there were those who offered her clothing and food and shelter.

It was then too that I surmised what I afterwards found to be a fact. Neither Master Bedford nor myself were taken prisoners in London, because it was known that the queen was dying, and that such an act might be harmful to those who laid hands on us. In my anguish I thought not of the purport of low-spoken words and meaning looks, but now all was made plain.

The queen—Bloody Queen Mary, as she hath been called

since—was dead, and thus those bigoted ecclesiastics, who would continue to burn heretics, were powerless. It was as though a black night pall were taken from the life of the nation, it was like the dawn of the morning after the most dreary and terrible night that the world had ever known. Moreover, Cardinal Pole was also dying, and so it appeared as though God willed that those who hid the sun from the land should be removed at the same time.

All I had passed through appeared only as a dream now —the queen was dead, and her minions were powerless.

"God save Queen Elizabeth!" I shouted with the rest, until the whole country-side echoed to the sound of our voices.

Presently, when Faith was taken to a house near by, and clothed with warm raiment, I told her what I could concerning her father; and then she, who a little while before was waiting one of the most terrible deaths that it hath entered the heart of man to conceive, declared that she would ride with me that very day to London town.

Of our journey thither, and of her meeting with her father, there is but little need that I should write. For the journey was uneventful, save that men met us everywhere with the cry, "God bless Queen Elizabeth!"—while smiles wreathed almost every lip; and as for the scene in the inn, when Faith was locked in her father's arms, it is not meet that I should write.

Oh, but London was a merry town that night. The bells of every church rang out, and people everywhere thanked God that the days of terror had come to an end. Never, so old men have told me, in the memory of living man had the nation rejoiced so greatly, never had men prayed so earnestly, "God bless our Queen!"

It was hard to leave Faith, even with her father, harder because Master Bedford promised to give her to me for my wife, but duty to my father bade me to return to him, and tell him I was safe and well. It is true I had sent him messages from France, but I knew that he was longing to see me, even as I was longing to embrace both him and Celia, and to tell them of the glad news.

"Thou wilt come to Barcroft soon, my lad," said Master Bedford

"Aye," I cried, "that I will." This also I promised to Faith as I held her in my arms, before starting for my old home.

I had not ridden far before I saw that I was but one of a great procession, for news had it that Queen Elizabeth was on her way to London, and so many of high degree went out to meet her. Among the bishops I saw Bishop Bonner, looking sullen and gloomy of countenance. When we got to St. Pancras his horse drew up beside mine.

"God save the Queen, my lord Bishop!" I said.

"Aye, masses are being said for her soul," he replied.

"I mean the new queen," I cried with a laugh, for truly my heart was gay.

"Hast thou changed thy religion with the rest of them?" he asked angrily.

"As to that I trow not," I said. "I know but little of letters, and am not learned in matters theological, but I love not burnings, and I do not believe that such as Master Hooper and William Hunter burn in hell."

He gave me an evil look, then he said—"I hear that thou wert in time to save the heretic daughter of that son of Belial, Godfrey Bedford."

"Aye, thank God," I made answer.

He spoke no more, but I knew from the look he bestowed on me that, had I spoken in this fashion a week before, he would have condemned me to the flames.

Presently we heard a great shouting, and as we drew near to the village of Highgate the road became so crowded that we could pass but slowly, and with difficulty.

"The queen is coming!"

The cry was on a thousand lips, and from the way it was uttered we could tell of the glad hearts which filled almost every breast, but I noticed that Bishop Bonner and several others looked ill at ease, as though they doubted much as to how the young queen would receive them.

A few minutes later I saw her Majesty, young and fair —aye, even beautiful. One could easily see that the fiery blood of King Harry ran in her veins, but she was not morbid and cruel like her sister.

When she came up the procession stopped, and then I

remembered now I had heard that the last time Elizabeth had travelled this road she was carried in a litter as a prisoner, and could Mary have had her way she would have been taken to the scaffold. Now, however, all was different. She sat there in power, surrounded by those who had sworn allegiance. Her eyes shone brightly as the bishops of Mary came to her, and, as I thought, a scornful smile wreathed her lips. Still, she held out her hand for them to kiss, and one by one they paid homage to her, until Bonner's turn came.

I watched her as he approached, and noted the dark look on the young queen's face. He bowed his head in order to place his lips on her hand; but with an expression of utter loathing, she snatched it back as though those lips which had uttered the death sentence of so many innocent people, contained a foul disease.

The old man stood back abashed and confounded; he knew now that his power was gone, and that his bloody work was at an end.

I would fain have accompanied the joyous crowd back to London, but remembering my father and Celia I put my heels to my horse's side, and was presently galloping at full speed towards home. It was a dull November day, but my heart was as light as that of a bird on a June morning, for the clouds had rolled away, and the spring had come before its time. And when at length I had been welcomed by my father, and held Celia in my arms, I sobbed for very joy, full-grown man as I was, and twenty-five years of age.

"God save the Queen, father," I said.

"Aye, God save the Queen, Dick, but I fear me the old religion will be gone."

"Heaven grant that it may, if what we have seen these last three years be the old religion," I made answer.

"Aye, it hath been a dark time; but I hold fast to the old faith, lad. It hath been good enough for the Hamsteads for many generations, and it shall be good enough for me till I die."

All the same, when I told him how my Faith had been condemned to die, and that it was only as if by a miracle

that I had been able to save her, his eyes grew hard and stern, even as Celia's became wet with tears.

"And you will wed her?" said my father.

"Aye, and with your blessing, if I may," I made answer.

"As to that she is a good maid," he replied: "and now that Elizabeth has begun to reign her father will have great honours."

After that we fell to talking about my experiences in France, which led by and by to my asking my father if he knew aught of Edward Rogers, the monk at St. Paul's Cross.

"Aye, he is well," said my father, and then he added—"you have asked me many times concerning him."

"I have also asked Master Bedford," I replied; "but he would tell me naught."

"Nay, he would not tell, because he knew that it was I who should make known to you his story."

"What is it?" I asked. "Why took he such an interest in me, and why tried he to help me?"

"I had a sister," said my father. "Her name was Celia, a pure good maid. So good that she went into a convent. While there, Edward Rogers, the Prior of St. Albans Abbey, saw her, and they loved each other."

"But that was sin, deadly sin," I cried.

"Aye, but they both fought against it, and in so far as such love could be pure their love was pure. That was in Henry's time, and Stephen Gardiner, who was secretary to Wolsey, found it out, and he would have visited a terrible retribution upon Rogers, but for the influence of two men."

"Who were they?" I asked.

"One was Master Godfrey Bedford, who in those days had much power, the other was myself."

"Aye," I said, "I understand."

"My sister died,—died of a broken heart," went on my father, "while Edward Rogers went mad!"

"Mad!"

"Aye, he was mad; he was harmless, but still mad for years, and then by and by when he grew more sane, I

pleaded again with Stephen Gardiner, and thus he was allowed to do menial work at the great church. The great Bishop took little heed of him afterwards, but from that time, by means of his mother, he discovered many of the Chancellor's plans, only as he declared that he might render service to me and mine ; to Master Bedford, and those he loved."

After this he told me much more about him which I need not write down here, but which explained many things which I could not understand.

"God bless him!" I said; "he shall never want a home nor a meal while I have one."

And now the history which I commenced to write long months ago, draws to an end, for with the coming of Elizabeth as queen my adventures ceased. Or perhaps I should speak more truly if I said that those adventures came to an end, for truly I have seen much service since then, and fought many a hard battle. But that doth not fall within the scope of Mary's reign, nor of my story. As I have said before, I have never seen the Spaniard since that terrible day on which the queen died, but report hath it that he is wedded to Mistress Varley, and that they have gone to the Spaniard's country. Now, as I write in the quietness of the night, I am glad that his death doth not lie at my door, although there have been times when I have believed that I had done God's service by killing him.

Although it was only in November when Queen Mary died, it was not until the following June that Faith and I were wedded. There were many reasons for this, one of which was that Master Bedford having found favour with the new queen, became much engaged in State matters, so that as he declared he had time to attend to nothing else. Thus it was that I had many a long journey through the winter from Hamstead Manor to Barcroft, but I minded it not a whit. How could I mind, when at the end of my journey Faith welcomed me with a glad laugh and loving words? Besides, June was the month when such as she should be wedded. God knows that the winter of her darkness had been long enough, and even now I dare

not attempt to tell of the trials she suffered at the hands of Bonner, nor of those terrible months of imprisonment, when every day was a terror. If I did, I should perchance write bitterly, and that I would not do, especially now that Bonner is dead, and the old black days over.

The whole country-side turned out to see us wedded, for our history had become known, and our sufferings had been recorded in story and song, so that our marriage became a great event. I remember shuddering as I passed the spot on which the stake had been placed, for the memory of the blackest morning of my life came back to me; but presently when the wedding was celebrated, and the crowds shouted their blessings from that same dread place I forgot my sorrows in my joys. For all my friends came to Brentwood that day. My father and Celia, Dorcas Udy and her husband, the monk of St. Paul's Cross as well as the friends of my boyhood came thither, to wish me joy.

There is only one other event that need be recorded, an event that gave my dear wife untold pleasure, although she declares she minded it not one jot. It happened on the seventh birthday of our eldest son Dick, but not only that, it took place on the very day on which our little daughter Faith was born. It was nothing more nor less than a summons to London to receive honour at the hands of the queen, and so it came to pass that when I returned home, and my wife presented me with the plump little maid who has since become another ray of sunshine in the house, I was able to tell her how good Queen Bess had honoured me.

"Are you in truth 'Sir Richard Hamstead'?" she asked with a glad laugh.

"Aye, that I am, and to-morrow I must ride with all speed to my father that he may know."

"And I, Dick?" she asked gaily, "what am I?"

"Thou art the best wife God ever gave to any man," I replied, and I spoke truly. Through storm and sunshine she has been with me, always brave, always cheerful, aye, even when my queen and country called me to posts of danger, she sent me thither with a kiss and a smile, and

bade me never to trouble for her. Not that she did not grieve, nay, I know her heart was well-nigh breaking all the time; but because she loved me truly, and because she knew that a man hath work to do in which his wife may not engage, she saw to it that no deed nor word of hers should place an obstacle in my way.

Aye, and she keeps her beauty still, and although the shadows of evening are beginning to fall upon us, we walk side by side in joyous content in the old home of my boyhood, and bless God for all His mercies.

THE END.

CONCERNING THE STORY

LEST WE FORGET

JOSEPH HOCKING

"LEST WE FORGET" is a great historical novel about an overlooked crisis in our history—the heroically helpless attempt of Sir Thomas Wyatt to prevent the marriage of Mary Tudor to Philip of Spain. The Hapsburgs conquered by marriages, and only the fact of Mary's childlessness prevented England's independence from going the way of that of Flanders. Upon the crimson foundation of Wyatt's rebellion and sufferings, Joseph Hocking has embroidered with thread of gold the love story of Faith Bedford and young Hamstead.